Bengaluru Monday, January 5, 2026 Pages 14 Vol 79 No 5 ₹7

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DH

DECCAN HERALD

The Power of Good

Halt 'arbitrary, flawed' SIR in Bengal: Mamata to EC

CM warns of 'mass disenfranchisement' if process continues

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High input costs force realtors to shy away from affordable housing

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State

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Quickly

Stones thrown at religious procession

Miscreants allegedly threw stones at a religious procession in Bengaluru's JJ Nagar around 8 pm on Sunday, officials said. A young girl, who was part of the procession and whose age remains unclear, is reported to have sustained minor injuries. She was taken to the hospital.
Details on Page 2

Centre clarifies on '150-km' airport rule

The '150-km aerial distance' rule, which prohibits the construction of a new airport within that radius, will not apply if the capacity of existing aerodrome saturates, Civil Aviation Minister Ram Mohan Naidu said, encouraging states to develop second airports in metro cities.
Details on Page 5

'India world's largest rice producer'

India has become the world's largest rice producer, beating China, with a total output of 150.18 million tonnes, Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said, as he released 184 new varieties of 25 crops. These varieties would boost production, he said.
Details on Page 10

'Do what's right': Trump warns new Venezuela leader

Acting head says govt stands united behind Maduro

CARACAS/NEW YORK, AGENCIES

Venezuelans living in Guatemala celebrate the ouster of Nicolas Maduro, in Guatemala City, on Saturday night. AFP

US President Donald Trump on Sunday said Venezuela's acting president Delcy Rodriguez may pay a bigger price than ousted leader Nicolas Maduro "if she doesn't do what's right".

Trump had initially praised Rodriguez after US forces seized Maduro and his wife from Caracas. Rodriguez said later, however, that her country would defend its natural resources.

"If she doesn't do what's right, she is going to pay a very big price, probably bigger than Maduro," Trump was quoted as saying in the telephone interview with *The Atlantic* as he arrived at his West Palm Beach golf course in Florida.

Trump's statement came even as Secretary of State Marco Rubio said the US was ready to work with Venezuela's remaining leaders if they make "the right decision".

The developments coincided with deposed leader Maduro's arrival in New York to face criminal charges, and the appointment of Vice President and Maduro loyalist Rodriguez as acting president for 90 days by the Venezuelan Supreme Court. The oil-rich nation's military has also recognised Rodriguez as the interim head of the state.

Rubio appeared to significantly soften President Donald Trump's extraordinary statements on Saturday that the United States will "run" Venezuela and that he would not be afraid to put military "boots on the ground."

Instead, he made clear that Washington is ready to try working with acting president Rodriguez and the rest of the ousted leader's cabinet.
▸ Maduro, Page?

Who is in charge in Caracas now?

- Vice President Delcy Rodríguez assumes charge of interim leader
- Daughter of a Marxist guerrilla
- Educated partly in France, where she specialised in labor law
- The 56-yr-old is known for building bridges with Venezuela's elites, foreign investors & diplomats
- After Venezuela's economy crashed from 2013-21, she led a market-friendly overhaul
- Though a Maduro supporter, she has impressed Trump officials with management of oil industry
- Trump never warmed to Venezuelan opposition leader María Machado and hence doesn't oppose Rodriguez assuming charge

India treads cautiously

Unlike Brazil, Russia and China — the other founding members of BRICS — India, despite holding the chair of the bloc, refrained from directly criticising the US action in Venezuela, instead expressing concern over the "recent developments" there.
Details on Page 5

$1 bn dues may be unlocked

A US-led takeover or restructuring of Venezuela's oil sector could deliver a direct benefit to India, potentially unlocking close to $1 billion in long-pending dues while accelerating the revival of crude production from fields it operates in the Latin American nation.
Details on Page 5

Bill proposes social security for destitute widows

SUJAY B M
BENGALURU, DHNS

In a first-of-its-kind move in the country, the Karnataka Labour Department is framing a law to provide social security and welfare measures to 'destitute widow women workers'.

The draft of the Karnataka Destitute Widow Women Workers (Social Security and Welfare) Bill, 2026, which *DH* has accessed, defines a destitute widow woman worker as one whose husband has died, who is engaged or capable of being engaged in any form of work, and who doesn't have "sufficient means of livelihood" and is living in "poverty, abandonment, homelessness and economic distress".

However, the draft has not set an income bar to define destitute widow women workers.

While there are Central and state schemes to provide pension and other financial assistance to widows, the Karnataka Bill — a pet project of Labour Minister Santosh Lad — seeks to provide comprehensive livelihood options for destitute women.

The Bill points out that every destitute widow woman worker has the right to work and earn her livelihood.
▸ Destitute, Page 4

Tense ties: B'desh team not to travel to India for T20 WC games

Board wants matches shifted to Sri Lanka

DHAKA, PTI

Mustafizur Rahman was released by KKR.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) on Sunday decided against sending its national team to India for the T20 World Cup next month citing security concerns and government advice, following IPL franchise KKR's decision to release pacer Mustafizur Rahman on BCCI's instruction.

Although the BCCI did not explicitly cite the current relations between the two countries for its decision to seek Rahman's release on Saturday, it did say that the move was triggered by what's been happening all around.

Rahman's dramatic ouster from the IPL prompted the BCB to call an emergency meeting on Saturday night and a day later, it announced the Board of Directors met again and decided that the national team will not travel to India for the T20 World Cup beginning February 7.

"The Board reviewed the situation in detail, taking into account developments over the last 24 hours and expressed deep concern over the overall circumstances surrounding the participation of the Bangladesh National Team in matches scheduled to be played in India," said the BCB in a statement.
▸ T20, Page 14

> Following a thorough assessment of the prevailing situation and the growing concerns regarding the safety and security of the Bangladesh contingent in India and considering the advice from the Bangladesh Government, the Board of Directors resolved that the Bangladesh National Team will not travel to India for the tournament under the current conditions
>
> **- BANGLADESH CRICKET BOARD**

Fast-track court to look into honour killing: CM

BENGALURU, DHNS: CM Siddaramaiah said on Monday that the state government would take steps to form a fast-track court to provide justice to the victims in the honour killing case of Manya Patil.

Taking to X, Siddaramaiah noted that the case came under the purview of the Act to curb atrocities against Dalits, and that a chargesheet had to be filed within 60 days. Steps had been taken to appoint a private prosecutor, he added.

Stating that honour killings make the entire society hang its head in shame, the CM added that steps would be taken to form a special law in the coming days.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah

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Kogilu: Residents to stay put as govt dithers on housing

BENGALURU, DHNS: More than two weeks after their homes were demolished, families in Bengaluru's Fakeer Colony and Waseem Layout are still living in makeshift tents amid the rubble, saying they have no other option.

Evicted residents stage a sit-in on Sunday. DH PHOTO

While they await rehabilitation, residents expressed their frustration against political leaders for neglecting them during their toughest times.

Mushtaq Hamid, one of the affected residents, is worried. A father of three daughters, he holds a voter ID and Aadhaar but is unsure how long will the government take to offer him an alternative house.

"I have been living in the colony for the last 28 years. I speak Kannada fluently. Yes, there are houses that came up in the last 2-3 years but all we are asking for is a small place to live," he said.

Like Hamid, a large number of families continue to camp in Fakeer Colony and neighbouring Waseem Layout — both government-owned properties.
▸ Kogilu, Page 4

Rs 1,464-cr interstate fake invoicing racket busted

BENGALURU, DHNS: Karnataka's Commercial Taxes Department has busted a Rs 1,464-crore fake invoicing racket operating across south India, officials said on Sunday.

The racket, unearthed by the Enforcement Wing (South Zone), generated fraudulent inward and outward supply transactions amounting to Rs 1,464 crore using forged and fabricated documents, the department said, adding the transactions were related to cement, iron, steel and other building materials.

It resulted in the wrongful availing and passing on of Input Tax Credit (ITC) of approximately Rs 355 crore without any corresponding movement of goods, the department added.

"Based on human intelligence gathering and continuous surveillance of tax filings and financial trails, coordinated search and seizure operations were conducted simultaneously in Bengaluru, Chennai, Vellore and Pernampattu. During these operations, officers seized 24 mobile phones, 51 SIM cards, two pen drives, multiple bank statements and several rubber stamps of business entities," the department said.

"During the operation, two brothers from Tamil Nadu, Irbaz Ahmed and Nafiz Ahmed, who had floated several fake firms such as Trion Traders, Wonder Traders, Royal Traders and Galaxy Enterprises, were apprehended."
▸ Racket, Page 4

A WAY OUT

Wildlife activists pitch for safaris run by locals

PAVAN KUMAR H
HUBBALLI, DHNS

Amid heightened tensions over human-animal conflict, there is a growing demand among wildlife and tribal activists to allow the local Eco-Development Committee (EDC) to operate jungle safaris in tiger reserves of Karnataka.

According to them, the move will provide two major benefits: 1) involvement and livelihood for locals from the forest; 2) The department will get extra hands for performing their primary duty of protection and conservation of forests.

Activists and experts say Karnataka could follow the model adopted by several tiger reserves in India, including Tadoba, Ranthambore, Dhikala, Pench, Bandhavgarh, where local villagers operate jungle safaris, while the forest department monitors the operations.

All the above mentioned tiger reserves are grappling with human-animal conflicts as rise of tiger numbers at these reserves are forcing the big cats to disperse from the protected area and prey on cattle and also accidently kill humans. Yet, there is not much resistance from locals against the presence of big cats, as these villagers are financially benefiting from the presence of tigers.
▸ Safaris, Page 4

What is an EDC?

EDCs are community-based organisations formed by the Forest Department to promote sustainable forest management. While locals are members of the committee, the Range forest officer (RFO) and Deputy RFOs act as office bearers. Through the EDCs, the department allocates locals to operate a safari.

Five sub-registrars suspended over software misuse

Action over property registration irregularities

BENGALURU, DHNS

The Department of Stamps and Registration has suspended five sub-registrars for misusing the Kaveri 2.0 software to register properties by violating the mandatory e-khata verification norms.

The action was initiated after preliminary inquiries revealed irregularities in the registration of properties.

The Inspector General of Registration (IGR) said in a statement that Kaveri 2.0 allows certain exemptions in the workflow, especially when property registrations are backed by court orders. However, at the Sarjapur sub-registrar office, this option was allegedly misused to register sale deeds even in cases where no court orders existed.

The fraudulent use of the 'court order-based registration' option enabled the registration of sale deeds without e-khatas, which are mandatory for property registration.

Following an inquiry, authorities placed Sarjapur Sub-Registrar Ravi Sankana Gouda under immediate suspension, the statement added.

Similar violations were identified at the Banaswadi, Varthur and Halasuru sub-registrar offices, where officials ignored the mandatory requirement to attach e-khata details from the e-Swathu software before registering sale deeds.

The department has suspended four sub-registrars pending departmental inquiry, while one of them has retired. The suspended officials are N Satish Kumar, Sridhar (in-charge sub-registrar), Girish Chandra and R Prabhavathi. The suspension orders were issued on January 2.

26-km walk inside drain shows Bengaluru's hidden pathways

Citizen-led initiative draws over 200 participants

BENGALURU, DHNS

More than 200 people walked on a path built inside a stormwater drain along a 26-km stretch connecting the city's south to the north.

A video of the walk, on New Year's Day, has been widely shared on social media.

The Bangalore Walks initiative was led by Arun Pai, Coordinator, Walkaluru, a joint initiative of citizens and the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA), which created the path.

The walk from RV Road, Jayanagar, to Orion Mall, Rajajinagar, aimed to focus on connected and walkable footpaths to show that the city has good walkways.

However, the main focus of this initiative was a 2-km stretch inside a 10-km drain from Shanthinagar to Hosur Road leading to Langford Road.

Chief Secretary Shalini Rajneesh, GBA Chief Commissioner M Maheshwar Rao and the commissioners of three city municipal corporations also joined the walk.

"We walked from sunrise to sunset, but this drain became the attention of the walk. It is an incredibly ambitious project and there is no project like this in the country," Pai said. He was referring to the K100 Citizen's Waterway Project to rejuvenate the stormwater drain.

Civic authorities have desilted the drain by removing more than two truckloads of silt and planted trees along the way to stop it from flooding. The plants have also beautified the path.

Participants of the 26-km walk from RV Road, Jayanagar, to Orion Mall, Rajajinagar, held on New Year's Day.

GBA Chief Maheshwar Rao said more such projects were planned across Bengaluru. "We are coordinating with the BWSSB to allow the flow of treated water into the drain as there is still a mix of sewage water in it. Once this is cleared, we will implement it in other drains as well," he told *DH*.

Prasad Paramashivappa, one of the participants, praised the efforts of the authorities. "Rajakaluves (stormwater drains) have disappeared in Bengaluru due to encroachments, but to see this project makes us happy," he said.

"Though there are some issues like dampness and overflowing, largely, the place is great," he added.

Fix first, use later

Naresh Narasimhan, the man behind the K100 Citizen's Waterway Project, said the work began with desilting and restoring the drain's hydraulic capacity, followed by intercepting and diverting sewage entering the system.

"At its peak, nearly 135 MLD of sewage flowed into the drain. This has been reduced to about 5 MLD through targeted interception and treatment," he said.

"Only after the waterway began functioning again as a stormwater system did we add public elements such as continuous walking paths, safe crossings, native landscaping and lighting. The idea was to treat the stormwater drain as part of the everyday public realm," he added.

Toddler rescued from 'treasure sacrifice' ritual

BENGALURU, DHNS: Officials from the District Child Protection Unit (DCPU) rescued a toddler in Bengaluru Rural district after a last-minute call to their helpline alerted them to a suspected child sacrifice ritual being conducted to gain treasure.

The incident took place on Saturday at a house near Sulibele in Hoskote taluk, on the city's eastern outskirts. When officials arrived, they found a pit, incense sticks, and coconuts nearby.

The one-year-old boy was rescued from another location after questioning his stepparents.

"The stepparents claimed they were given the child by someone in Kolar to care for, as they did not have a male child. We have asked them to appear before the Child Welfare Committee on Monday," a DCPU official said.

Stones thrown at religious procession

BENGALURU, DHNS: Miscreants allegedly threw stones at a religious procession in western Bengaluru's JJ Nagar around 8 pm on Sunday, officials said.

A young girl, who was part of the procession and whose age remains unclear, is reported to have sustained minor injuries. She has been taken to the hospital for treatment.

The incident led to a large mob gathering outside the JJ Nagar police station seeking immediate action. Tensions prevailed in the area for some time.

Senior officers, including Deputy Commissioner of Police (West) Yathish N, were at the spot trying to pacify the situation and ensure it didn't escalate.

KSRP platoons were also deployed to the spot to maintain law and order.

"My daughter sustained injuries to her head as we were walking in the procession. We don't know who they are. It was dark and they ran away," Varadaraj, a devotee, told reporters.

Police sources said a case has been registered. CCTV footage is being examined, and other technical evidence is being collected to identify the culprits.

Woman dies of asphyxiation in sleep as fire breaks out in flat

BENGALURU, DHNS: A 34-year-old woman died of asphyxiation after a fire broke out in her flat in east Bengaluru, police said on Sunday.

The deceased has been identified as Sharmila, a resident of Subramanya Layout, under the limits of the Ramamurthy Nagar police station. She worked with a private firm in Bellandur and hailed from Dakshina Kannada.

The incident occurred shortly after 10.50 pm on Saturday, fire department officials said. With her roommate away at her hometown, Sharmila was alone in the flat at the time.

Police suspect she died due to asphyxiation after smoke engulfed the house while she was asleep. Neighbours who noticed the smoke alerted the police and the fire department.

The fire is suspected to have been caused by a short circuit, though investigations are on.

Biker killed after lorry knocks him down in Nagarabhavi

BENGALURU, DHNS: A 29-year-old motorcyclist was killed after a speeding lorry rammed into his two-wheeler from behind near Nagarabhavi in west Bengaluru on Saturday night.

The deceased, Prakash MD, was returning from a child's birthday party with a friend when the incident occurred around 10.30 pm near the Male Mahadeshwara Temple, close to the 'Nammoora Thindi' hotel.

According to the Jnanabharathi traffic police, the lorry, which was travelling in the same direction, crashed into the rear of Prakash's two-wheeler. Prakash sustained critical head injuries, while his friend, who was riding pillion, sustained with minor injuries and is undergoing treatment at a local hospital.

Passersby rushed Prakash, who was bleeding profusely, to a nearby hospital, where he was declared brought dead.

Prakash worked with a gold loan company and hailed from Tumari village in Sagara taluk of Shivamogga district.

Police have seized the lorry and arrested the driver for rash driving causing death.

Phones, SIMs seized in prison raid

BENGALURU, DHNS: Officials said on Sunday they recovered five mobile phones, six SIM cards, one charging cable and one earphone from inmates at Parappana Agrahara Central Prison here.

The searches — part of the 'Prison Reforms Awareness Campaign' — were carried out on Saturday between 12.20 pm and 4.20 pm.

A new case has been filed to investigate how the prohibited goods were smuggled into the prison complex.

Since November, 24 FIRs have been registered over the smuggling of prohibited items, police said.

So far, authorities have recovered 126 mobile phones, 98 SIM cards, 18 sharp objects and other prohibited items.

Residents protest liquor shop near school, temple

BENGALURU, DHNS

Hundreds of local residents on ECC Road, Whitefield, protested on Sunday against a liquor shop opening near a school, residential areas and places of worship.

The site — originally meant for a three-storey building — now has a ground floor plus seven floors, the protestors said.

Vanisri, president of the residents' welfare association, said: "The liquor shop is proposed on the ground floor. The school is just 150 metres from this building. There are temples nearby and yet they are opening the shop."

When residents complained to the authorities, they were informed that rules prohibit liquor shops within 100 metres of a school campus. This particular shop has been permitted because it is 150 metres from the school, she added.

Residents of ECC Road, Whitefield, oppose the upcoming liquor shop during a protest on Sunday.

When residents complained to the authorities, they were informed that rules prohibit liquor shops within 100 metres of a school campus. This particular shop has been permitted because it is 150 metres from the school.

Residents of Prithvi Layout, Umiya Woods, Prestige Boulevard, Citilights Rustique and Gopalan Atlantis participated in the protest.

The protestors expressed concerns about the safety of families, especially women and children. They pointed out that thousands of schoolchildren use the road and footpaths to walk to the school, and families visit the temple next door.

Water supply cut in Lingarajapuram amid contamination fears

BENGALURU, DHNS: The Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) has stopped water supply to the Lingarajapuram area, where residents complained of water contamination.

As a temporary measure, the board has started supplying water by tankers, also known as Sanchari Kaveri.

The BWSSB stated that it was investigating the source of water contamination utilising advanced robotic technology alongside dedicated ground staff.

"We are using every technological resource available to trace the fault line without digging up the entire area blindly," BWSSB Chairman Ram Prasath Manohar stated.

The BWSSB has promised to identify the source of contamination, fix the pipeline and restore clean water supply by Monday evening. It has requested residents to use free water tanker services until the piped supply is restored.

◆ IN THE CITY ◆

GENERAL

'Bhu Suraksha Yojane': Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda to inaugurate; Bengaluru North Sub-Divisional Officer's Office, Kandaya Bhavan, KG Road; 10.30 am.

World Braille Day: Dr CN Manjunath to attend; Organised by National Federation of the Blind; Kassia, Vijayanagar; 3 pm.

CULTURAL

Carnatic classical music show: KS Vishnudev and team; Surabharathi, HRBR Layout; 6.30 pm.

◆ CITY WEATHER ◆

FORECAST

Mist

TEMPERATURES

Maximum	27.0°C
Minimum	15.0°C
Rainfall (as of 8:30 am)	--
Humidity (as of 5:30 pm)	75%
Sunset (Jan 5)	6:06 pm
Sunrise (Jan 6)	6:42 am
Moonrise	7:30 pm
Moonset	7:30 am

(Relevant data recorded at 5.30 pm) Source: IMD

Need a hand? Write to us

Letters of grievances are pouring in and we are doing our best to accommodate as many as possible. Readers may write in to highlight civic problems affecting their locality and we will help address them in an interactive and effective manner.

Grievances and issues related to public utility agencies such as Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB), Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC) and Bangalore Electricity Supply Company Limited (Bescom) would be highlighted in the weekly column. The writeups, which could be accompanied by photographs highlighting the problems, will be published on Mondays. Mail your grievances to: peoplesproblems @ deccanherald.co.in

Bescom creates civic nuisance in ISRO Layout

Bescom's S-5 subdivision, located at 9th Cross in ISRO Layout, has dumped three discarded vehicles, broken RCC poles and other waste material on the land adjacent to its office, creating a serious civic nuisance. From their condition, the abandoned vehicles appear to have been lying there for decades.

The area has consequently become infested with rodents and snakes, causing significant hardship to residents living opposite the Bescom office. BBMP sanitation staff are unable to clean the road due to the presence of these abandoned vehicles, turning the stretch into a garbage blackspot.

Residents demand the removal of decades-old abandoned vehicles as the stretch turns a blackspot.

Despite repeated appeals to local officials and even to the Bescom managing director, no action has been taken so far. We, the elderly residents of ISRO Layout, are now compelled to patrol the street late into the night to prevent people from dumping garbage and urinating in the area.

We urge the Bescom officials concerned to take note of the difficulties faced by the residents and immediately arrange for the removal of the discarded vehicles, enabling the BBMP to clean and maintain the road.

CS Prasad
ISRO Layout

We urge the authorities concerned to take necessary action to curb this practice and ensure that residential neighbourhoods are protected from excessive noise caused by street vendors.

VS Ganeshan
Sanjaynagar

Footpath encroachment under Hennur flyover

The footpath beneath the Hennur flyover is piled with mud and broken concrete, forcing pedestrians to step onto the carriageway to cross the stretch. Given the heavy traffic congestion in the area, this poses a serious risk to pedestrian safety.

Recently, my wife narrowly avoided a fall and had to steady herself against a bus halted at a traffic signal. Such incidents highlight the dangers caused by the poor condition of the footpath and the lack of timely civic intervention.

These hardships are a direct result of civic apathy. The Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA), which has recently come into existence, must ensure pedestrian safety by maintaining good roads and keeping footpaths clean, clear, and encroachment-free.

David Dayan Ahiah
Hennur Main Road

No skywalks at two Yellow Line stations

It has been nearly five months since Namma Metro's Yellow Line became operational.

However, skywalks are yet to be provided at the Bommasandra and Hebbagodi metro stations. As a result, commuters, especially senior citizens, are finding it extremely difficult and unsafe to cross Hosur Road to reach the opposite side towards Hosur.

It is surprising and disappointing that both the Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL) and the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) have failed to address such a basic commuter safety issue.

Sivaram G

Noise pollution in residential areas

It is high time that the use of loud sound systems by street vendors in residential localities is regulated, as they seriously disturb the peace and tranquility of neighbourhoods.

Such noise pollution adversely affects children, the elderly, and those who are unwell. In recent times, this problem has grown into a major nuisance across several residential areas of Bengaluru.

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Vendors can register by accessing the link below to obtain the registration forms/tender forms. Quotations must be submitted online only; printed or physical copies will not be accepted.The E-Tender online portal will be available from **5th January 2026 till 19th January 2026** using the credentials provided.

For tender form allocation, those who aspire to apply should remit Rs.1,000.00 (non-refundable) online for obtaining the tender forms in each category. Completed tender forms along with quotations must be submitted online on or before **19th January 2026.**

All tenderers proposing to apply should note; All tenderers must possess mandatory licenses required to conduct business and comply with FSSAI Act, rules, and regulations applicable at all times. Certification/labelling for all products and temperature control for chilled and frozen items as per FSSAI standards is mandatory. HACCP/ISO-certified vendors will be preferred.

The window for submitting initial rates will remain open until 12:00 AM on 19th January 2026.

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TAJ CLARIDGES COLLECTION SELEQTIONS GATEWAY VIVANTA GINGER TREE OF LIFE amā Gmin TAJ SATS

Office of the Executive Engineer PWD (B&R) Division Guna (M.P.)

Notice Inviting Tender No. 12/2025-26 Date - 24.12.2025

Office of the Executive Engineer, Public works department (B&R) division Guna, for the following works, from the centrally registered firm/contractors through the website **https://mptenders.gov.in.** tender are invited. Tender condition and other document are attached with the tender form which can be downloaded and viewed from the website. Work description and the detailed of bid submission for purchasing online tender are as follow.

S.No.	Name of District	Nature of work	Online Tender no.	Name of Work	Number of Call	Probable Amount of Contract (Rs. in lakh)	Earnest Money	Cost of Bid document	Time Period of work Completion	Physical submission (original other document) at the office of as mentioned
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1	Guna	Road Maintenance	2025_PWDRB_470660_1	Special strengthening work of Binaganj Bypass Road (Old N.H.) length 5.00 Km.	I	145.66	145660.00	12500.00	03 Month Including rainy season	Only online As provided in the portal (https://mptenders.gov.in)
2	Guna	Road Maintenance	2025_PWDRB_470661_1	Old A.B. Road (Old N.H.) Ruthiyai City Portion Strengthening Work Length 2.70 Km.	I	135.19	135190.00	12500.00	03 Month Including rainy season	__Do__
3	Guna	Building Maintenance	2025_PWDRB_470662_1	Special Repair Work of Quarter No H/4 PWD Rest House Campus Guna	I	3.96	7920.00	2000.00	01 Month Including rainy season	__Do__
4	Guna	Building Maintenance	2025_PWDRB_470664_1	Special Repair Work of PWD Sub Division (E/M) Guna	I	3.31	6620.00	2000.00	01 Month Including rainy season	__Do__

The above tenders will be published on the website **https://mptenders.gov.in.** After making the online payment from 05.01.2026 the tender form (tender document) will be available through the website. The last date for purchasing tender forms and submitting bids is schedule on 19.01.2026 at 17:30hrs. Detailed NIT and other information can be seen on the above mentioned website. The amendment in the tender will be published only on the above mentioned website and will not be published separately in the newspapers.

G-23896/25

Executive Engineer
PWD Division Guna

Ministry of Rural Development
Government of India
All-weather roads to every village
Under Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana in last 11.5 years 1.47 lakh schools, 83 thousand hospitals, 1.39 lakh agricultural services and 3.28 lakh transportation services have been connected with all-weather roads
Nation Building through Rural Development
CBC 35101/13/0047/2526
Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana
25

Two more held for posting 'derogatory' content against Darshan's wife

BENGALURU, DHNS: Bengaluru police have arrested two more people for posting derogatory content against jailed Kannada film star Darshan Thoogudeepa's wife Vijayalakshmi, officials said on Sunday.

The arrested are Nagaraj Gullappa Talwar, 23, a petrol bunk manager from Hubballi, and Prashanth Talwar, 23 year, an auditor from Dharwad. With this, total arrests in the case have gone up to four. In a police complaint on December 24, 2025, Vijayalakshmi had stated that certain individuals were posting "low-level, obscene, derogatory" posts, comments and messages against her and her family on social media platforms.

She had sought legal action against more than 18 individuals.

"During the initial stage of investigation, officers of the cybercrime police station secured two suspects who had posted obscene messages against the complainant and her family on social media and proceeded with further inquiry," a police statement said.

SUCI(C) protests US 'aggression' on Venezuela

BENGALURU, DHNS: The Socialist Unity Centre of India (Communist) staged a demonstration at Freedom Park on Sunday, condemning what it termed US military aggression against Venezuela and demanding the immediate withdrawal of American forces.

The protest, led by the party's Bengaluru district committees, criticised 'Operation Absolute Resolve', which allegedly resulted in the capture of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.

Protesters held placards and raised slogans against what they described as "imperialist expansion", calling the US action a "dastardly attack" on Venezuela's sovereignty.

Addressing the gathering, V Gnana Murthy, secretary of the SUCI(C) Bengaluru North district committee, alleged that the kidnapping of a democratically elected leader and his wife had exposed the "liberal façade" of US foreign policy.

"This invasion is not merely an assault on one nation, but a threat to the entire Latin American region, aimed at forcing sovereign states into submission at gunpoint," Murthy said.

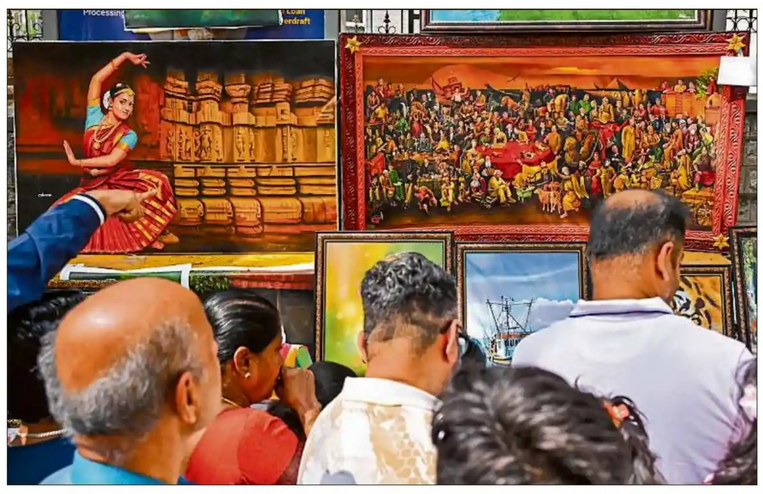
He further alleged that the unilateral aerial strikes and subsequent invasion violated Article 2 of the United Nations Charter, and urged citizens to view the Venezuelan struggle as part of a larger fight for global security and independence.

N Ravi, a senior district committee member (Bengaluru South), described the US administration as "war-mongers", accusing it of attempting to control Latin America's natural resources through "world monopoly capital".

He added that while countries such as Cuba and Mexico have voiced opposition, the United Nations must act decisively to avoid becoming a "toothless" body.

V GNANA MURTHY
Secretary, SUCI(C), Bengaluru North district committee

> This invasion is not merely an assault on one nation, but a threat to the entire Latin American region, aimed at forcing sovereign states into submission at gunpoint.



Enthusiasts browse through paintings on sale at the Chitra Santhe art fair on Kumara Krupa Road in Bengaluru on Sunday. DH PHOTOS/PUSHKAR V

An art lover captures a displayed work on his phone at the art fair.

Nature's hues, creative chaos: Art fair draws eco message

3 lakh connoisseurs attend annual art carnival; many artists make a windfall

ASHWIN B M
BENGALURU, DHNS

Bengaluru's cultural pulse quickened on Sunday as the 23rd edition of Chitra Santhe transformed Kumara Krupa Road into a mega art gallery.

Over three lakh visitors braved their way in the crowd to witness the annual art carnival, which this year traded its usual palette for a deeper shade of green under the theme of 'Environmental challenges'.

Organised by the Karnataka Chitrakala Parishath (KCP), the fair was inaugurated by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah. The entrance featured a big installation of 'Vriksho Rakshathi Rakshithaha' (trees protect those who protect them), which greeted visitors alongside a large honeycomb and bee artworks.

The banners fluttered above the KCP campus honoured green warriors like Saalumarada Thimmakka, Rajendra Singh, K P Poornachandra Tejaswi, Tulsi Gowda, Salim Ali and Medha Patkar, grounding the aesthetic beauty of the fair in environmental activism.

With over 1,532 artists representing 22 states and 33% women artists, the event featured a stunning range of medium, from ancient Tanjore and wood art to unique coffee and sand art.

While contemporary oil, acrylic and palette knife works lined the road, live cartoonists kept the crowd engaged with quick caricatures.

Rani Banerjee, a Bengaluru-based artist, saw her collection titled 'Calmness within' featuring blooming flowers and watchful eyes sell out for Rs 1.25 lakh.

"The eyes on the bloom represent nature looking back at us," she explained.

Meanwhile, V Raju from Tamil Nadu became a crowd favorite with his sand art. Made from grains of sand on black graphite sheets, his portraits of Buddha and Ambedkar sold for anywhere between Rs 2,000 and Rs 10,000 for big frames.

Omkar Kulkarni, a first-time participant from Pune, said the response was so overwhelming he had covered his travel and stay costs by noon.

"Everything after lunch is pure profit," he chuckled, surrounded by his serene water colour landscapes.

For those seeking high-value investments, a stunning oil painting of two peacocks in 3D effect by artist Ramanjaneya fetched Rs 1.5 lakh. Another masterpiece by Gokulam Vijay from Tamil Nadu, priced at Rs 1 lakh, depicted an old man clutching paddy saplings — a poignant tribute to rural life that resonated with the year's ecological focus.

The day's highest-valued sale was likely a Rs 3 lakh oil on canvas by Coimbatore-based artist Satish Mani. The piece portrayed a group photo of historical figures from across the ages, ranging from Moses to Bruce Lee.

Despite the huge footfall, the event remained manageable due to the heavy deployment of traffic and police personnel.

The BMTC's feeder buses from Majestic and Vidhana Soudha provided a lifeline for visitors, ensuring the pedestrian-only zone remained a sanctuary for art lovers.

A vendor arranges art works depicting gods.

The day's highest-valued sale was likely a Rs 3 lakh oil on canvas by Coimbatore-based artist Satish Mani

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah inaugurates the 23rd Chithra Santhe by signing on the canvas in Bengaluru on Sunday.

At Chitra Santhe, CM pledges to hike state's forest cover to 30%

Govt to consider requests for museums on achievers in every dist

BENGALURU, DHNS

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Sunday described art as the "mirror of Karnataka's culture".

He was speaking after inaugurating the 23rd edition of Chithra Santhe, the iconic annual street art festival, organised by Karnataka Chitrakala Parishath on Kumara Krupa Road here.

The CM stressed the fair's role in providing a global platform for artists and connoisseurs. This year's edition, themed 'Environmental challenges,' saw a large turnout of artists from 22 states and 4 union territories. Noting that this was his eighth time participation in the event as CM, Siddaramaiah lauded the KCP's 60-year legacy.

"The Parishath has been creating a marketplace for art works. The event has successfully bridged the gap between creators and the public," he noted.

The CM addressed the demand for museums in every district, dedicated to achievers in preserving the state's heritage, saying the government would consider the requests positively. On this year's theme, he stressed the urgency of ecological conservation.

"If we protect nature, nature will protect us. Environmental knowledge is the need of the hour, especially as pollution in cities like Delhi make them nearly uninhabitable".

Afforestation: The state aims to plant 3 crore to 5 crore saplings annually, he said.

Forest cover: While the ideal forest cover is 33%, Karnataka currently stands at 20%. The CM pledged to bridge this gap.

Inspiration: He cited the legendary Saalumarada Thimmakka as a role model, urging citizens to nurture trees with the same affection they show to their children

This edition featured over 1,500 artists, with stalls stretching from Windsor Manor junction to Shivananda Circle. The event was also attended by Higher Education Minister M C Sudhakar, KCP president B L Shankar and others.

A nature-based thematic exhibition curated in collaboration with Vanaloka Foundation will remain open at the Parishath galleries till January 12.

Rangayana branches struggle to stay afloat as youngsters look other way

VITTAL SHASTRI
KALABURAGI, DHNS

The decline in the number of youngsters opting for theatre as a profession seems to be threatening the very existence of government-funded repertories, the Rangayanas.

All its branches in Kalaburagi, Dharwad, Shivamogga, Davangere and Karkala in Udupi district, except the main repertory in Mysuru, are struggling due to a paucity of artistes and technicians. The number of applicants to these posts has reduced over the years.

The trend is attributed to lack of initiative by schools and colleges to host cultural activities. Funds crunch in the institutes to pay adequate remuneration is also a dampener for artistes and technicians in choosing to join Rangayana.

The number of applicants for the posts of artistes and technicians at the branches of theatre repertory Rangayana in Kalaburagi (in pic), Dharwad, Shivamogga, Davangere and Karkala in Udupi district has seen a drastic decline over the years.

MALLIKARJUN KADAKOL
Director, Davangere Vrutti Rangayana

> We pay a meagre Rs 2,000 to artistes for a play. The result is a severe shortage of artistes in Rangayana. The repertories should start certificate and short-term courses to train artistes, apart from giving them good remuneration. The government should allot more funds for this purpose.

On contract

The repertory's branches have been appointing 12 artistes and 3 technicians on annual contract basis. The artistes get a monthly remuneration of a mere Rs 18,000.

The Kalaburagi Rangayana invited applications thrice this year. Yet, it got only 17 eligible applications for posts of artistes for 2025-26, against 47 it received in 2019-20. The Dharwad Rangayana got merely 16 in the current year against 45 applications in 2019-20, though the city has for long been a prominent cultural hub and home to Hindustani music stalwarts.

Political appointees

Researcher and theatre practitioner Prakash Garud lamented that there was political interference in the appointment of Rangayana directors and artistes would not prefer to work under political appointees with no theatre background.

"Rangayana should serve as research centres, besides conducting workshops and drama festivals to encourage budding artistes. These days, artistes are attracted to other media, where they get higher remuneration. Rangayana should hire them for at least three years, along with extending maximum age limit for applicants from 30 years," Garud, who had served as Dharwad Rangayana director, told *DH*.

Shivamogga Rangayana has got 34 applications this year against 88, five years ago.

The situation in Karkala and Davangere branches is no different. All Rangayanas are facing severe shortage of technicians, including in lighting, sound and stage hands, who get Rs 25,000 a month.

'Rope in schoolkids'

"We are facing a severe shortage of artistes and technicians. We need four female artistes to run theatre activities. But we have received applications from only three, forcing us to appoint all of them. The government should establish Rangayana exclusively for children. Heads of the repertory should visit schools and colleges to create awareness about the activities at Rangayana. This will help attract youngsters to the repertory," Kalaburagi Rangayana director Sujata Jangamshetty said.

Shivamogga Rangayana administrator Dr Shailaja A C lamented that the repertory was not just grappling with shortage of stage performers, but also facing a dearth of quality artistes.

"Theatre art is only a second priority for people as they pursue high-paying jobs. Artistes should be paid handsome remuneration apart from giving them job security," she said.

Better opportunities

Davangere Vrutti Rangayana director Mallikarjun Kadakol said 15,000 to 18,000 theatre plays are performed every year in rural areas, especially during annual fairs, and artistes are attracted to them as they get good remuneration.

"We pay a meagre Rs 2,000 to artistes for a play. The result is a severe shortage of artistes in Rangayana. The repertories should start certificate and short-term courses to train artistes, apart from giving them good remuneration. The government should allot more funds for this purpose," he said.

Serials & films

Ninasam Ranga Shikshana Kendra principal Dr Ganesh M Heggodu said each year, 120 theatre artistes come out from various institutions in the state, including private repertories, after training and many prefer to work in TV serials and films.

"A few decades ago, artistes used to prioritise satisfaction over money. Now, they look for job security. Also, the number of private and government theatre repertories has increased, expanding opportunities," he said.

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11 monkeys found dead near Tumakuru, poisoning suspected

TUMAKURU, DHNS

The detection of 11 monkey carcasses over the past two days in Devararayanadurga forest in Tumakuru taluk has raised suspicion of poisoning the simians.

Acting on the information provided by the local residents, the Forest department officials visited the spot to conduct a search.

They found carcasses of nine monkeys and two langoors within a short distance of 400-500 meters.

The doctor at veterinary hospital in Urdigere conducted post mortem and samples have been sent to veterinary university in Bengaluru for further examination.

Assistant Conservator of Forest Shashidhar said that prima facie the monkeys have not died of any disease and post mortem report will throw more light on the cause of death.

A case under Wildlife Protection Act has been registered, he said.

A team of Forest officials conducted a search on Sunday also, but did not find any carcass.

Deputy Commissioner Shubha Kalyan held a meeting with the officials of Forest and Animal Husbandry department in connection with the issue, on Sunday.

Ballari clash: 26 people, four gunmen of Cong MLA arrested

No action yet against those named in five FIRs

BALLARI, DHNS

The Ballari police on Sunday arrested 26 people in connection with a violent clash that stemmed from a dispute over erecting banners in front of former minister and BJP leader Janardhana Reddy's residence at Avambhavi in the city on Thursday night.

Based on evidence collected during the investigation, eyewitness accounts and the video footage, the police arrested 26 people, including the Congress and the BJP workers, and produced them before a local court.

So far, six FIRs have been registered in connection with the clash, according to a press release by in-charge Superintendent of Police Ranjithkumar Bandaru.

The arrests were made based on the suo motu case registered by Brucepet police. The arrested are: Karthik, Mukkanna, Inayathulla, Raju, Mustafa, Srikanth, Mohammad Rasool, Babu, Venkatesh, Mabasha, Guruprasad, Vasundhar, Shivakumar, Sachin, Abdul Razak, Bajjaiah, M Thimmappa, Gundali Srinivas, K B Lakshman, P Srinivas Reddy, Pothappa, Shadakshari, Ravibabu, Ravikumar and Rangaswamy. Interestingly, those named in the five FIRs have not been arrested.

Meanwhile, the police have arrested four private gunmen of Congress MLA Nara Bharath Reddy. Gurucharan Singh, who is said to have opened fire in the air during the clash, was subjected to intense grilling. Indiscriminate firing of the gunman had allegedly taken the life of Rajashekar Reddy, a Congress worker.

Ballari city is treading back to normalcy. But the reserve police personnel are still deployed at major roads and areas in the city.

Security enhanced

However, the officers from various districts, who were roped in for security, have returned to their places. Security at the residences of BJP leaders Janardhana Reddy, B Sriramulu and Somashekar Reddy has been enhanced.

On the night of January 1, clashes erupted over banner row near Janardhana Reddy's residence at Avambhavi.

The supporters of the Bellary City MLA, in large numbers, marched to Avambhavi and attempted to erect banners pertaining to the unveiling of Valmiki statue, which was scheduled for January 3.

The clashes took a violent turn with supporters of Bharath Reddy and Janardhana Reddy pelting stones at each other. The private security personnel of the MLA allegedly opened fire in the air, resulting in the death of a Congress worker.

R ASHOKA
Leader of Oppn in Assembly

"The Ballari police in their suo motu case have mentioned that Congress MLA Bharath Reddy, along with over one thousand supporters, marched to Janardhana Reddy's residence and attacked it. But they (police) still pretend not to know about who instigated the riots/clash. The whole world knows who was behind the violent clash, but the state government has refused to act.

Valmiki statue installed without govt permission?

The statue of Valmiki was installed at the circle named after the sage without taking the permission of the government, it is alleged.

The Supreme Court in its 2006 order has barred installing statues on the public places, including roads and circles. The apex court laid down the guidelines on the same. Based on the top court's order, the Karnataka government in 2012 issued an order banning installation of statues on roads and circles.

But in this case, the Valmiki statue was installed without taking due permission from the state government, it is said. What's more, a Rs 1.15 crore government grant has been used for making the statue, sources confirmed.

The organisers had sent two proposals to the state government seeking its permission to regularise the statue installation. But the government had not replied to the proposals.

The 16-tonne Valmiki statue was sculpted by Mysuru-based sculptor Arun Yogiraj, the creator of the idol of Ram Lalla installed in Ayodhya. The statue was installed in Ballari on Dec 25 in a grand ceremony and the official unveiling of the statue was planned for January 3, which was postponed indefinitely at the behest of the chief minister and his deputy.

CHALAVADI NARAYANASWAMY,
Leader of Oppn in Council

"The ammunition is yours, personnel who opened fire are yours, the victim who died in the firing is your man... But the cases were registered against Janardhana Reddy and B Sriramulu. The government should have arrested the men who kept private gunmen. Instead it has 'arrested' (seized) guns.

G JANARDHANA REDDY
Gangavathi MLA

"The ASP has said that four private gunmen of Bharath Reddy have been arrested. The officer claimed that Gurucharan Singh opened fire in the air. The said gunman is a personal bodyguard of Bharath Reddy and his family. In such case, the police should also arrest the man who roped in Singh as his gunman.

Govt mulling handing over Ballari case to CID: HM

BENGALURU, PTI: The state government is mulling handing over the probe into the recent violent clashes in Ballari to the CID, Home Minister G Parameshwara said on Sunday.

The incident involved firing, raising questions over the use of private firearms.

"I had said this before, the guns of the gunmen hired for private security have been seized. Now the ballistic expert's report will reveal from which gun it was fired. I have told the Forensic Science Laboratory officials to give an investigation report. The process is on. The ADGP had told me that the firing didn't happen with police gun," Parameshwara told reporters.

When asked whether the case would be handed over to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) or a special investigation team (SIT) would be formed, the Home Minister said the options were under consideration.

"We are also mulling it. There are possibilities of giving the matter to the CID. I will speak to CM Siddaramaiah. If need be then we will do it," he said.

He said strict action would follow if the involvement of private gunmen was established.

"If it comes out that private gunmen were involved in it then we will have to take action. We have received complaints from both sides. Police will investigate whether guns or hand grenades were used," he added.

Trump threatens new Venezuela...

Maduro, From Page 1

"We're going to judge everything by what they do, and we're going to see what they do," Rubio told CBS News' "Face the Nation". "I do know this: that if they don't make the right decision, that the United States will retain multiple levers of leverage."

Rubio also said discussions about holding elections in Venezuela were "premature".

Earlier in the day, Venezuela's defense minister rejected any notion that the US would "run" his country, projecting an official line of defiance as the Trump administration said it would seek to exert "leverage" over the country's leadership.

Publicly, Rodriguez and the defense minister, Vladimir Padrino Lopez, have said the government that was in place under Maduro is still in charge.

Maduro was brought to the US following the middle-of-the-night operation that extracted him and his wife, Cilia Flores, from their home in a military base in the capital, Caracas — an act that Maduro's government called "imperialist". The couple faces US charges of participating in a narco-terrorism conspiracy.

After arriving at a small airport in New York City's northern suburbs, Maduro was flown by helicopter to Manhattan, where a convoy of law enforcement vehicles, including an armored car, was waiting to whisk him to a nearby US Drug Enforcement Administration office.

A video posted on social media by a White House account showed Maduro, smiling, as he was escorted through that office by two DEA agents grasping his arms.

In Venezuela, the defense minister said a large part of Maduro's security team was killed in the US raid.

The nation's capital remained unusually quiet Sunday with few vehicles moving around and convenience stores, gas stations and other businesses closed. The presidential palace was guarded by armed civilians and members of the military.

Woman's murder: Yellapur bandh total, peaceful

YELLAPUR (UTTARA KANNADA DIST) DHNS: The Yellapur bandh called by pro-Hindu organisations condemning the murder of Ranjitha Banasode evoked good response in Yellapur on Sunday.

Shops and commercial establishments remained closed and weekly shandy also was not held. Vegetable vendors who had come from far-off places for the shandy had to return with their ware without doing any business.

The post mortem on Ranjitha who was allegedly murdered by a Muslim youth, was conducted at KMCRI in Hubballi on Sunday, and later the body was sent to Yellapur under police escort.

Murder suspect ends life

Rafiq Yalluru, who is accused of stabbing Ranjitha to death, has ended his life by hanging himself. SP Deepan M N told that he was found dead hanging by a tree in Kajalawada forest, on Sunday morning.

IN REVERENCE

The Sri Rajarajeshwara Sahasrarjuna Maharaja Jayanthi Samiti, in association with the ABSSK Samaj, SSK Sangha and SSK Co-operative Society Ltd, celebrated the birth anniversary of Sahasrarjuna Maharaja at Bunts' Sangha in Vijayanagar on Sunday. (L-R) MLAs M Krishnappa (Vijayanagar) and Priya Krishna (Govindarajanagar) receive a memorandum from Samiti Convenor M N Ram, Treasurer MC Umashankar, ABSSK Samaj's Khoday Ramachandrasa, Brij Mohan, SSK Sangha president S Anant and former president Wagale Raju.

Rs 1,464-cr interstate fake invoicing racket busted

Racket, from Page 1

"In addition, Eddala Pratap and Revati, who had created shell entities, including Power Steel and Cement, PR Construction, SV Traders and SRS Cement Steel Traders, were arrested in Bengaluru. The Special Court for Economic Offences, Bengaluru, has remanded all four accused to judicial custody for a period of 14 days," the department stated.

The operation was carried out following actionable leads developed through human intelligence and round-the-clock surveillance.

The investigation revealed that multiple GST registrations had been fraudulently obtained using forged documents, including stamp papers sourced from online platforms, fabricated rental agreements, forged signatures of landlords and tenants, false tax-paid receipts and forged notarial attestations, the department noted.

"These registrations were used to create layers of shell entities for issuing and circulating fake invoices while presenting an appearance of legitimate commercial activity. After availing of and passing on substantial amounts of ITC, the entities involved voluntarily cancelled their GST registrations in an apparent attempt to obscure audit trails and evade further scrutiny.

"This points to an emerging modus operandi wherein cancellation of registration itself is being misused as a tool to camouflage large-scale tax fraud. The Enforcement Wing (South Zone) is examining appropriate systemic safeguards to address this evolving risk," the department explained.

It added: "The detection was enabled through advanced GST system analytics. The Enforcement Wing South Zone's in-house developed Non-Genuine Taxpayer (NGTP) module, together with IP address trails from the GST back office, identified abnormal invoicing patterns and circular ITC flows across multiple entities. These analytical insights led to focused and coordinated enforcement action across several locations."

Kogilu: Residents to stay...

Kogilu, from Page 1

While the authorities consider them encroachers, residents insist they have nowhere else to go and say they will remain on the land until they are rehabilitated.

On Sunday, the Kogilu Layout Slum Residents' Struggle Committee — comprising more than 10 progressive organisations — met to chart the next course of action as the state government continues to delay rehabilitation for evicted families.

Committee member Manohar Elavarthy said the affected families would continue their protest peacefully.

Mubina Khathir, an Urdu teacher, has been teaching children in the settlement for several years with the support of a non-profit organisation. Initially living in a rented house nearby, she moved to the colony and built a shed after her husband left her. She now fears being pushed onto the streets if rehabilitation is further delayed.

Chikka Rangamma, one of the affected residents, expressed frustration over the absence of local MLA Krishna Byre Gowda, who is also the revenue minister.

"I am sure he will come and beat me for taking his name, but the government has done nothing to protect us," she said.

Haseena, a mother of five, said that not only were her children born in a government-run hospital in Yelahanka, but she herself was born in Bengaluru.

"My father came from Andhra Pradesh many years ago. I studied at the school next to the colony. We have all the documents, but no one in the government wants to know how we are living after our houses were demolished. My ten-month-old son keeps falling sick," she said.

Activist Nandini Kuvempu, who is visually impaired, urged the government to distribute houses without bowing to political pressure.

"The Opposition is spreading lies that residents have lived here for only one or two years. That is not true. They have been here for more than 20 years. No one here is from Bangladesh," she said.

Bill proposes social security to...

Destitute, from Page 1

The Bill proposes to form the Karnataka State Destitute Widow Women Worker Social Security and Welfare Board to provide social security and other welfare schemes for registered beneficiaries and their families. The board will also have a mandate to impart skills to the beneficiaries.

The Bill proposes to form the Karnataka Destitute Widow Women Worker Social Security and Welfare Fund, which will be bankrolled by the destitute widow women worker welfare cess on the sale of petroleum products.

Additionally, the fund will also receive contributions by registered widow women workers, grants-in-aid from the state and Union governments, donations under the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funds, money generated through investments of the board, etc. The funds will be utilised and managed by the board.

Sources pointed out that the main chunk of the funds would flow from CSR contributions or budgetary grants or allocations. The department is looking at using such CSR funds to develop microenterprises by aligning with NGOs. Officials are also exploring options of using Central grants if possible.

The Bill proposes registration of beneficiaries and mandates the issuance of a registration certificate with a validity of three years. Only those beneficiaries with a valid registration certificate will be eligible for the social security benefits.

The proposed legislation also notes that the board must maintain a database of all registrations and undertake the digitisation of all records through a "dedicated" software.

Each registered worker shall be assigned a unique identification number or a similar number generated either in the e-shram, Seva Sindhu or Ambedkar Sahayasta portals.

"This Bill looks beyond providing pensionary benefits to women. It seeks to provide comprehensive livelihood options and erase the social stigma for destitute widow women workers. The intention is to build their social status and provide employment opportunities, if possible," Additional Labour Commissioner G Manjunath told *DH*.

He noted that pre-legislative consultations will soon be conducted.

All India Trade Union Council Trade Unions (AICCTU) state secretary Maitreyee Krishnan welcomed steps to provide social security to destitute widow workers but underscored the need for an urban employment guarantee act.

Activists pitch for safaris run by locals

Safaris, from Page 1

"Currently, the tribal communities or the villagers living in and around the tiger reserves of Karnataka are not benefiting from the jungle safaris. The fee collected for the safari is utilised by the respective foundations for paying of salaries and other maintenance of forest infrastructure," said Gopikrishna, president of the Nagarahole Conservation Society. Conservation of forest without the cooperation of tribal and forest dwellers is very difficult, he added.

Gopikrishna pointed out that the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) guidelines mandate that ecotourism activities, including safaris, be designed to provide direct economic incentives and sustainable livelihoods for local communities so that it fosters community involvement and a shared commitment to conservation efforts. "Currently this is not being followed," he said.

Allowing tribal people, who are well versed with the forest and behavior of animals, not only provides them financial stability but also ensures that the forest department gets additional hands for its primary duty of protecting and conserving forest.

"Tourism and recreation is not the prime task of the forest department; protection of forest and prevention of wildlife crime is. By allowing EDCs to operate safari we can allow more forest staff for patrolling and forest management activities," said wildlife activist Joseph Hoover.

But he cautioned that over-exploitation of tourism shouldn't be allowed even after allowing EDCs. "All the safaris, including those guests of private resorts and JLR, should be operated by tribal and native villagers, while the department officials should strictly ensure entry of vehicles as per the carrying capacity set by the task force," he says.

An EDC is already operating the jungle safari in Kali Tiger Reserve. Kallu Shiralkar, member of the Pansoli EDC, said there are 20 vehicles being operated by locals and it has improved not just the lives of the driver and naturalists but also the village. "As much as 75% of the total collection from tourism is allocated to EDC. From the additional funds, we are able to provide drinking water storage facilities and solar street lights at our villages inside the protected area," he said.

Forest Minister Eshwar Khandre said his ministry had not received any proposal in this regard.

"Our government is open to this idea if it helps local people and wildlife," he said, adding that one-third of the revenue generated by the safari will be used for the welfare of tribal and local villagers.

DH Classifieds

PERSONAL

Change of Name

I, DEEKSHANTH NARASIMHA, Residing at #4, Doddabidarakallu Nagasandra Post, Bangalore-73 have changed my name as DEEKSHANTH NARASIMHA. K.A. vide affidavit dated 02/01/2026 before Notary V.Anjanappa Bangalore

I, MAHESH LAXMANA POOJARY, residing at Kundapura, Udupi-576230 have changed my name as MAHESH LAXMAN POOJARY, vide affidavit dated 03/01/2026 before Notary K.S. Bammappanavar, Bengaluru

I, NAVYA, Residing at Bengaluru- 560108 have changed my name as NAVYA JHA, vide affidavit dated 03/01/2026 before Notary K.S. Bammappanavar, Bengaluru

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VENEZUELA CRISIS: Govt avoids direct criticism, unlike Russia, China, Brazil & South Africa

India treads cautiously as BRICS slams US action

ANIRBAN BHAUMIK
NEW DELHI, DHNS

BALANCING ACT

- India, despite being BRICS chair, avoids echoing partners' condemnation
- Govt caught between tariffs and ties
- Russia terms US action armed aggression
- China says US violated international law

Unlike Brazil, Russia and China — the other founding members of BRICS — India, despite holding the chair of the bloc, refrained from directly criticising the United States' military action in Venezuela, instead expressing concern over the "recent developments" in the South American nation.

A day after the US 'captured' Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores, India said it was "closely monitoring the evolving situation", but avoided directly criticising the Donald Trump administration.

With its own relations with Washington DC strained by the 50% tariffs imposed on India's exports to the US — and with both sides attempting to smooth over tensions — New Delhi chose to tread cautiously. India, however, reaffirmed its support for the well-being and safety of the people of Venezuela. "We call upon all concerned to address issues peacefully through dialogue, ensuring peace and stability in the region," the Ministry of External Affairs said on Sunday.

The other BRICS nations explicitly condemned the US action in Venezuela. Russia described it as an act of armed aggression. China said the US had clearly violated international law by conducting the operation and forcibly removing Venezuela's president. Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva also strongly denounced the strikes, calling them an unacceptable crossing of a line.

South Africa, another BRICS member, described the actions as a manifest violation of the Charter of the United Nations, which mandates that all member states refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state. As a member of IBSA along with India and Brazil, South Africa even called for a special session of the UN Security Council to discuss the unilateral action by the US.

In the past, New Delhi had joined other BRICS nations in reaffirming commitments to multilateralism and to upholding international law, including the purposes and principles enshrined in the UN Charter. However, despite holding the BRICS chair since January 1, India did not echo its partners in the bloc when reacting to the US actions in Venezuela.

Strain in ties

Apart from Trump's tariff tirade against India, New Delhi's relations with Washington DC came under strain in 2025 over the US president's public claim of having made India stop buying oil from Russia, his growing bonhomie with Pakistan's civil and military leadership and his boasts about mediating the May 10 ceasefire between the two South Asian neighbours.

India and the US are now trying to ease tensions, though negotiations over a trade deal have yet to achieve a breakthrough.

A protester shouts slogans and holds a placard during a demonstration against US's attack on Venezuela, along a street in New Delhi on Sunday. AFP

Cong expresses concern; Left parties slam 'US aggression'

NEW DELHI, DHNS: Congress on Sunday expressed "grave concern" on the actions by the United States relating to Venezuela, while five Left parties strongly denounced the American "aggression" and said Donald Trump's statement that they will capture oil reserves in the Latin American country lay bare the "real intentions" behind the action.

Congress and the CPM also found fault with the Modi government's response to the developments, claiming that its statement did not even mention the US by name.

"The INC (Congress) expresses very grave concern on US actions relating to Venezuela in the past 24 hours. Settled principles of international law cannot be violated unilaterally," Congress General Secretary (Communications) Jairam Ramesh said.

CPM found fault with the government statement, saying, "How low can you bow?" It accused the government of remaining "shamefully silent, unable to even criticise, let alone condemn Trump's nakedly imperialist US aggression".

"The kidnapping of an elected President. The forcible takeover of a sovereign nation. Blatant violations of international law. Democracy being strangled before the world's eyes. An openly declared agenda of capturing oil," it said. A senior Congress leader said the Ministry of External Affairs statement did not even mention the US.

The Left parties — CPM, CPI, CPI(ML)L, RSP and All India Forward Bloc — in a joint statement urged the Modi government to join the voices of countries across the world condemning the US aggression and stand firmly with Venezuela. It called for "nationwide protests against US aggression and in solidarity with the people of Latin America".

"US President, Donald Trump, in his address, stated that they would capture the oil reserves of Venezuela, laying bare the real intentions behind this aggression. The US Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, went a step further and warned that Cuba and Mexico would be their next target," they said.

US-led reset of Venezuela oil may unlock $1 billion for India

NEW DELHI, PTI: A US-led takeover or restructuring of Venezuela's oil sector could deliver a direct benefit to India, potentially unlocking close to $1 billion in long-pending dues while accelerating the revival of crude production from fields it operates in the sanctions-hit Latin American nation, analysts and sources said.

India was once a major processor of Venezuelan heavy crude, importing more than 4,00,000 barrels per day at peak levels, until sweeping US sanctions and rising compliance risks forcibly shut down purchases in 2020.

Its flagship overseas producer, ONGC Videsh Ltd (OVL), jointly operates the San Cristobal oilfield in eastern Venezuela, but output has been severely curtailed as US restrictions blocked access to critical technology, equipment, and services - leaving commercially viable reserves effectively stranded.

Venezuela has failed to pay OVL USD 536 million in dividends due on its 40% stake in the field up to 2014, and a near-equivalent amount for the subsequent period for which Caracas has refused to permit audits, effectively freezing settlement of the claims.

Sanctions could be eased after a dramatic US operation removed President Nicolas Maduro and placed the country's vast oil reserves under American oversight, analysts and energy executives said.

Once sanctions are eased, OVL can move rigs and other equipment from places, such as its parent ONGC's oil fields in Gujarat, to San Cristobal to revive output that has plummeted to 5,000-10,000 barrels per day, officials in the know of the matter said.

The onshore field can produce 80,000-1,00,000 bpd with more wells and better equipment, they said, adding that San Cristobal needs rigs similar to those operating in Gujarat, and Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) owns many such rigs.

US control of the Venezuelan oil sector also means exports to the world would start soon, and OVL can recoup its past USD 1 billion dues from San Cristobal from such revenues, they said.

OVL and other Indian firms can also take more fields in Venezuela and revive production from the Carabobo-1 Area - another Venezuelan heavy oilfield with Indian interest. OVL holds 11 per cent interest in Carabobo-1, while Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) and Oil India Ltd (OIL) hold 3.5% stake each.

Venezuelan national oil company Petroleos de Venezuela SA is the majority stakeholder in both San Cristobal and Carabobo-1.

Analysts said the US cannot replace all international companies and will need firms like OVL, not just for their expertise but also for the market they bring in.

India will be a key buyer of Venezuelan crude once the Latin American country is able to restore its lost glory with help from the US and other companies.

Indore water contamination: 20 new diarrhoea cases detected

INDORE, PTI: Twenty new patients were detected in Indore on Sunday after health teams screened over 9,000 persons amid a diarrhoea outbreak caused by contaminated drinking water in the country's cleanest city.

Officials said health teams examined 9,416 individuals from 2,354 households during an ongoing survey in the city's Bhagirathpura area, where six persons have lost their lives due to contaminated water, and identified 20 fresh cases.

According to officials, 398 patients have been admitted to hospitals so far following the outbreak. Of them, 256 patients have been discharged after recovery. They said that 142 patients are currently undergoing treatment in hospitals, including 11 admitted to ICUs.

The administration has confirmed six deaths so far. Mayor Pushyamitra Bhargava had said on January 2 that he had information about 10 deaths. However, local residents have claimed that 16 people, including a six-month-old child, have died due to the outbreak.

Kerala: Row over proposed CBI probe against Oppn leader

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, DHNS: A Kerala Vigilance and Anti-Corruption Bureau (VACB) report recommending a CBI probe against Opposition leader V D Satheesan has triggered a political row in the state.

While Satheesan and other Congress leaders alleged that it was a political ploy ahead of the Assembly polls, the CPM government seemed to be in a fix in proceeding further on the report owing to its political position against Central agencies.

The VACB's recommendation pertained to suspected Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act or FCRA violations in the "Punarjani" project for supporting weaker sections.

The project was implemented through a foundation, and Satheesan campaigned NRIs to contribute to the project for the rehabilitation of those hit by the 2018 floods.

Even as the VACB recommended a CBI probe into the suspected FCRA violations, it also said there was no evidence for initiating a corruption case against Satheesan under the Prevention of Corruption Act.

Though the VACB submitted the report several months ago, the state government has yet to take any action based on it.

Incidentally, the vigilance report came out on the day a two-day Congress leadership camp to prepare an action plan for the Assembly polls began. Satheesan said if it were a political move, he would fight it politically, and if it were a legal move, he would fight it legally.

150-km rule won't bar new airports once capacity is saturated: Naidu

VISAKHAPATNAM, PTI: The '150-km aerial distance' rule, which prohibits the construction of a greenfield airport within that radius, will no longer apply if the capacity of the existing aerodrome is saturated, Civil Aviation Minister Ram Mohan Naidu said on Sunday.

Ram Mohan Naidu

The minister said the Ministry of Civil Aviation is also encouraging states to develop second airports in metro cities to meet growing demand.

"When it comes to the 150-kilometre radius policy, it is one that guides the initiation of airport development. Once capacity is saturated, the clause no longer applies. There is an opportunity for the state to cater to a second airport," Naidu said.

"So, the policy ensures the operational stability of the first airport, but it does not restrict the development of another airport once capacity has been saturated," he added.

As per existing rules, no greenfield airport is permitted within an aerial distance of 150 km of an existing civilian airport. However, if a greenfield airport is proposed within 150 km of an existing civilian airport, its impact on the existing aerodrome is examined on a case-by-case basis.

He said the Noida International Airport at Jewar is close to final approvals, with inauguration targeted later this month or early February.

NDA set to expand Rajya Sabha lead

Cong and Left may lose ground across key states

SHEMIN JOY
NEW DELHI, DHNS

This year will see elections to 72 Rajya Sabha seats, in which the NDA is likely to win around 50, up from the current 40, while the I.N.D.I.A bloc may see a decline of five seats from its present strength of 25.

Taking Assembly strengths into account, the BJP is likely to win 37–38 seats, depending on how many it allocates to allies, while the Congress could see a marginal increase from eight to nine seats. The BJP has 30 sitting members whose terms expire in April, June, July and November.

In 2026, the Congress will cease to have a Rajya Sabha MP from Gujarat with Saktisinh Gohil's retirement in June, while CPM representation will be limited to Kerala following the exit of Bikash Ranjan Bhattacharya, its lone MP from West Bengal, in April. The Congress will have no Rajya Sabha MPs from 17 states and Union Territories.

The precarious numbers for the MVA, coupled with recent strains within the alliance, may hurt the prospects of the NCP (SP) in Maharashtra, potentially leaving it without RS representation as its two MPs retire.

At present, the BJP-led NDA has the support of 135 MPs, including seven unattached nominated members, while the I.N.D.I.A bloc has 80. Another 29 MPs are unattached. After the elections, by November, the NDA's tally is likely to rise to around 145, while I.N.D.I.A may fall to about 75.

The BJP will gain one more seat in West Bengal at the expense of the CPM, while Trinamool will retain its four seats. In Bihar, five seats are up for election, with the RJD and JD(U) holding two each and the RLM one.

In Andhra Pradesh, the NDA is likely to win all four seats, with the BJP possibly gaining an extra seat. The BJP may also increase its tally to four seats in Odisha. However, it is expected to lose its seat in Jharkhand to the JMM.

The Congress is likely to lose one seat each in Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Gujarat, while it may gain one additional seat in Haryana, Karnataka and Himachal Pradesh.

VPNs in the crosshairs as J&K tightens internet surveillance

ZULFIKAR MAJID
SRINAGAR, DHNS

In recent weeks, police and civil administrations across several districts of Jammu and Kashmir have intensified enforcement against Virtual Private Networks (VPNs), issuing prohibitory orders and initiating action against violators.

The move has drawn attention because VPNs are legal under Indian law and commonly used for privacy, secure browsing, and access to geo-restricted services.

Authorities have said the enforcement is linked to security and public order concerns. According to police and intelligence sources, some users, particularly youth, have been using VPNs to mask their digital activity, bypass monitoring, and access restricted content.

"Encrypted platforms and VPNs have been used by individuals involved in illegal or extremist activities, making detection and investigation more complex," they said. "During recent verification drives, a significant number of seized mobiles were found to have VPN applications installed."

A paramilitary trooper checks his mobile phone in Srinagar. AFP FILE

SECURITY-DRIVEN

- Temporary prohibitory orders restrict the use of "unauthorised" VPNs
- It says VPNs could be used to spread misleading or inflammatory content
- VPNs have been widely used in Kashmir, particularly during periods of internet restrictions
- Police call the curbs preventive and temporary
- They say it is to maintain public safety and cybersecurity

In recent years, law enforcement agencies have come down heavily on users sharing or forwarding radical or inflammatory content online.

District magistrates in Kupwara, Kulgam, Shopian, Pulwama, Budgam, Kathua, and other districts have issued temporary prohibitory orders restricting the use of "unauthorised" VPNs.

The orders note that VPNs could potentially be used to bypass lawful monitoring, access encrypted platforms, coordinate activities that affect public order, or spread misleading or inflammatory content.

VPNs have been widely used in Kashmir, particularly during periods of internet restrictions, such as the prolonged mobile internet suspension after the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019. Many residents relied on VPNs to access news, communication apps, and social media during these periods.

Previous enforcement drives targeted individuals using VPNs without authorisation, citing concerns about misuse in sensitive situations. The current crackdown builds on these precedents, with authorities invoking special powers available under local law-and-order regulations to impose temporary restrictions.

The focus on the internet and VPNs in Kashmir reflects the region's unique security and social context. Authorities view digital platforms as critical channels for communication and information, which, in the past, have been exploited for propaganda, mobilisation, and the spread of misinformation. In this environment, internet controls and monitoring are framed as tools to prevent unrest and maintain law and order.

While authorities present the measures as necessary for security, some observers have raised concerns about privacy, proportionality and the impact on ordinary users. Critics note that blanket restrictions may inconvenience residents who rely on VPNs for legitimate purposes and that such measures do not address underlying social or political factors.

Police personnel at the site where Jarmal Singh, an AAP leader and village sarpanch, was allegedly shot dead while attending a wedding, in Amritsar, on Sunday. PTI

Assam government's plan to allot land to tea garden workers faces hurdles

SUMIR KARMAKAR
GUWAHATI, DHNS

The BJP-led government's decision to allot land to over 3 lakh tea-garden workers — its major vote bank in poll-bound Assam — is caught in complications, with estate-owners flagging several hurdles.

The Tea Association of India, a prominent organisation of tea-planters and traders, has said the move could land them in legal trouble as those land parcels have been given to banks as collateral for loans.

The land in Assam's over 850 big tea gardens was leased by the government decades ago for plantations, factories, and housing for workers. However, garden workers lacked land documents (patta), causing several problems, including the inability to take bank loans.

In November last year, the Assam government passed the Assam Fixation of Ceiling on Land Holding (Amendment) Bill, paving the way for the allotment of land deeds to workers living in labour lines.

Workers carrying baskets pluck tea leaves at Amguri in Sivasagar district. PTI FILE

This was one of the major demands of tea-garden workers, another being the grant of Scheduled Tribe (ST) status.

The decision to provide land patta is significant given that tea-garden workers are a deciding factor in at least 35 out of Assam's 126 Assembly constituencies.

As the BJP targets Bengali-speaking Muslims with the "infiltrators" tag, the party's focus is on the tea-garden workers' and indigenous communities' votes.

The bill for allotment of land was passed amid the garden workers' agitation to "teach the BJP a lesson" for failing to meet its pre-poll promise of ST status.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday said many garden-owners were not cooperating in the handing-over of the land to the government. "Let me make it very clear today that action may be initiated against garden owners who are not cooperating with the government. The government may withdraw the incentives for the production of orthodox tea or other matters," he said.

Tea Association of India president Sandeep Singhania said on Saturday that although they appreciated the government's intent, transferring the land would create financial complications as they were collateral to banks.

CAMPUS CAMPER

11 yrs in first year: MBBS student puts UP college in a fix

GORAKHPUR (UP), PTI

An unusual case has come to light at the BRD Medical College in Gorakhpur, where an MBBS student of the 2014 batch has remained in the first year for more than a decade after failing to clear the first-year examination.

Grappling with regulatory hurdles, the college administration has now approached the National Medical Commission (NMC) seeking its guidance to resolve the issue.

According to college authorities, the student, who could not clear the first-year MBBS examination in 2015, has been residing in the UG hostel since 2014. He has neither filled out the examination form nor appeared for any subsequent attempts in the last 11 years. He is also not engaged in regular academic activities, officials said.

Under existing medical education rules, a student who fails the first-year MBBS examination is not required to seek fresh admission and can reappear by simply filling the examination form. Due to this provision, the student's enrolment continues to remain technically valid, preventing the college from cancelling his admission.

Repeated counselling sessions by the college authorities failed to yield any result, following which the administration contacted the student's father. However, despite three phone calls from the principal's office asking him to visit the college, the student's father has not turned up so far, the officials said, adding that the father has shown little concern for his son's academic future.

DECCAN HERALD
ESTABLISHED 1948

Apathy to blame for Indore tragedy

At least 11 people have lost their lives after drinking piped water supplied by the municipal corporation in Indore, ironically touted as India's cleanest city. The toll is placed unofficially at 14. The city faced a health emergency when more than 2,000 people fell ill and over 200 were hospitalised, with 32 of them being treated in the ICU. The contamination was caused by a breach in the water pipeline. It led to drinking water coming into contact with dirty water from a sewage line. The residents had been complaining of a foul smell emanating from the taps for some weeks, but neither the officials nor the municipal councillor took the complaints seriously. Timely investigation and action would have averted the tragedy. The callousness of the authorities was also seen in the words of state minister and local MLA Kailash Vijayvargiya who snapped at a reporter who asked him a question about accountability.

The tragedy was clearly a result of administrative negligence. The many agencies and departments concerned are blaming one another for it. The National Human Rights Commission and the Madhya Pradesh High Court have raised questions about the tragedy. A committee has been appointed to investigate the matter. Formation of committees, visits of leaders, announcement of compensation, and suspension of officials are routine measures taken after every such tragedy. It is clear that there were lapses and those who had to ensure that the pipes were intact and the supply was clean failed in their duty. It is not the first case of water contamination in Madhya Pradesh in recent times. In November, many students on the Vellore Institute of Technology (VIT) campus in Bhopal fell ill after drinking contaminated water. It led to vandalisation and violence on the campus.

Impure drinking water has claimed at least 11 lives in 'India's cleanest city'

The fact that water contamination affected a city declared the cleanest in the country eight consecutive times shows that any place is vulnerable to it. Programmes such as the Swachh Bharat Mission and the Jal Jeevan Mission have not been able to ensure supply of clean drinking water to all people. Cases of water contamination and break-out of water-borne diseases are reported at regular intervals from many parts of the country. About 70% of the surface water in the country is reportedly contaminated. According to the Central Ground Water Board's 2024 report, over 30% of the samples it collected from distribution stations had higher than permissible levels of contamination. It is the responsibility of the state to ensure supply of clean water, a basic requirement of public health.

Don't ruin futures of kids, teachers

For more than a decade, Karnataka has made the Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) a mandatory gateway to government school jobs, holding out the promise of quality teaching and merit-based recruitment. Today, that promise rings hollow. Nearly 4.5 lakh candidates have cleared the test since 2014–15, yet only 28,277 teachers have been recruited. Thousands of qualified candidates now find themselves stranded, staring at the prospect of becoming age-barred. The irony is striking: the Department of School Education and Literacy has the highest number of vacancies in the state government, at 79,694 posts. A responsible government would treat this as an emergency, given the direct impact on classrooms and learning outcomes. Instead, recruitment has been paralysed.

The government's primary defence is the unresolved issue of internal reservation within the Scheduled Castes. Since October 2024, recruitment was effectively frozen while the state awaited the recommendations of the Justice H N Nagamohan Das Commission; it later attempted to implement a sub-classification formula. Legal challenges followed swiftly. Interim orders of the High Court, and broader Constitutional questions about breaching the 50% reservation cap laid down in the Indra Sawhney judgment, have resulted in a prolonged stalemate. While the Karnataka Scheduled Castes (Sub-classification) Bill, 2025, has been passed, appointments remain on hold pending the court's final verdict. This legal and policy tangle may explain the delay, but it does not justify the human cost. For lakhs of eligible candidates, this prolonged uncertainty has meant crushed hopes and wasted years. They appeared for the TET, assuming timely recruitment would follow. Instead, the test has become, as many ruefully put it, a burden rather than a bridge to employment. If the government cannot recruit, it should at least suspend the test until these issues are resolved.

School appointments are on hold because of an administrative stalemate

Compounding the problem is the state's decision to plug the gap by hiring over 50,000 guest or temporary teachers. Experience from other departments shows that temporary appointees eventually demand regularisation, leading to an entirely new problem for the government to resolve. More importantly, frequent teacher turnover undermines continuity and adversely affects learning outcomes in government schools that cater to the most vulnerable children. A pragmatic approach would be to set aside the internal reservation issue for the School Education and Literacy Department for the present and proceed with recruitment under the earlier policy. Internal reservations can be implemented prospectively to fill vacancies arising in future. To hold an entire generation of qualified teachers and students hostage to an unresolved legal battle is neither just nor sensible. When such paralysis afflicts the education system, it amounts to a theft from the future.

POWER WITHOUT RESTRAINT

US and the doctrine of unilateral force

Geo-economic interests drive American aggression against Venezuela, deprive the smaller country of its sovereignty, and disturb the world order

DEEPANSHU MOHAN

On January 3, large-scale US airstrikes on Caracas were set against the backdrop of heightened tensions in the Caribbean and recent interdictions of vessels alleged to be carrying narcotics in Venezuelan waters. The White House framed the operation as a necessary effort aimed at dismantling narco-terrorist efforts threatening to destabilise the region.

It is important to situate America's aggressive military action into perspective. The large-scale operation on Venezuelan territory and the capture of its leader is based on much more than just the drug-trafficking and weapons charges being levelled against Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro. President Donald Trump alleged that Maduro maintained close ties with powerful drug cartels responsible for the flow of narcotics into the US, contributing to rising overdose deaths, and that his government possessed dangerous weapons hostile to US interests.

Long-standing concerns over irregular migration from the southern hemisphere were also folded into this narrative, with the President claiming that Caracas deliberately emptied its prisons and facilitated the entry of criminals and patients from mental institutions into the US, claims that critics argue may serve as post-hoc justification for the use of force. Reports suggesting the capture of President Maduro, however, point towards objectives extending beyond law enforcement. They indicate a possible attempt to operationalise regime change, consistent with a revamped US national security strategy that treats American primacy in the Western Hemisphere as non-negotiable.

In this context, allegations that Venezuela has hosted Russian military facilities revive the logic of the Monroe Doctrine historically invoked by Washington to resist extra-hemispheric interference, now repurposed to legitimise unilateral US action. Venezuela's close relationship with the Kremlin under its left-leaning government thus appears to be a central trigger for Washington's response.

The White House has since stated that it seeks to oversee a "safe, orderly, and judicious" transition of power in Venezuela, signalling continued US involvement in the country's political future.

Alongside this, Washington indicated plans to revive Venezuela's oil sector, a move with clear strategic benefits, given that the country holds the world's largest proven oil reserves. The promise of economic reconstruction, however, remains inseparable from the political and geopolitical costs of the intervention.

The American operation reveals a broader geoeconomic strategy embedded in US-Latin America relations, one that extends beyond counter-narcotics justifications. It unfolded against the backdrop of Venezuela's vast hydrocarbon reserves and Maduro's sustained refusal to reopen large-scale oil trade or allow meaningful American corporate participation in Venezuela's energy sector. As a result, US business involvement and extraction activity in Venezuela have remained negligible, while China

has emerged as the country's principal importer of crude oil.

Despite its economic decline, Venezuela remains central to global energy markets and the US's strategic competition with China and Russia. Even as the US administration urged renewed engagement, American oil firms reportedly stayed away amid political volatility, making regime change and the prospect of a US-backed government increasingly appealing.

The implications are graver than they look, as, legally, the strike sits on uncertain ground. International law prohibits the use of force against another state's territory unless authorised by the United Nations Security Council or justified as self-defence against an armed attack. Drug trafficking, however serious, does not meet that threshold under established international jurisprudence. Legal scholars argue that such US action sits uneasily with customary international law, as the undertaking of a large-scale military strike and the pursuit of regime change amount to a direct breach of Venezuela's sovereignty in the name of national security.

Analysts warn that Washington has risked not just erosion of the rule of law, as the UN Secretary-General stated, but also brought itself to the doorstep of potential war crimes under International Humanitarian Law if the hostilities are recognised in light of severe civilian damage. By framing military action as a law-enforcement necessity, Washington risks diluting the legal distinction between policing and warfare, a boundary that has long protected weaker states from unilateral intervention.

The broader implication is the gradual erosion of the rules-based international order that major powers themselves claim to uphold. If military strikes become an accepted tool for managing economic risks, criminal networks or political defiance, international law risks being reshaped by power rather than principle.

Strategy of territorial assertion

The US actions towards Venezuela reinforce a permissive global climate where unilateral force eclipses legal restraint. China's territorial ambition towards Taiwan is increasingly advanced through graduated coercion that fuses geoeconomic pressure with rehearsed territorial encirclement, a strategy Beijing has pursued consistently but with growing scale and confidence.

China's approach was most clearly demonstrated during the Justice Mission 2025 military drills in December. Several exercise zones extended into areas within 12 nautical miles of Taiwan's coast, marking a significant escalation in proximity and intensity.

China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs described the drills as a "punitive and deterrent action" against Taiwan independence forces and their external supporters, embedding territorial escalation within a long-standing sovereignty narrative rather than presenting it as a novel response.

Against this backdrop, Venezuela's national sovereignty has been violated with apparent impunity to safeguard Washington's perceived strategic vulnerabilities in the Caribbean arising from Russia's presence in the region. While Venezuela remains a fully functioning sovereign state, the situation appears markedly different in the case of Taiwan. In his New Year's address, Xi Jinping reiterated that reunification with Taiwan is "unstoppable", framing territorial consolidation as a historical and sovereign inevitability rather than a discretionary policy choice.

Taken together, these military actions and political statements reflect a deliberate strategy of incremental territorial assertion consistent with Beijing's long-standing Taiwan policy. The strategy is further reinforced by an international environment in which unilateral economic coercion and selective legal enforcement by major powers, particularly its principal competitor, the US, continue to occur with limited multilateral constraint, thereby lowering the perceived legal and reputational costs of sustained territorial pressure.

(The writer is a professor of Economics and Dean, O P Jindal Global University, and a visiting professor at the London School of Economics)

RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE

A game of names

Nomenclature offers quiet delights in cricket

K S NARAHARI

'What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet,' said William Shakespeare in Romeo and Juliet. But if one looks at it more intensely, it means a lot.

In the November 2021 Test match between India and New Zealand in Kanpur, there was an instance when Patel and Ravindra batted together for a long time to defy Patel and Ravindra. Actually, Ajaz Patel and Rachin Ravindra, New Zealand's last batting pair, effectively countered the spin bowling of India's Axar Patel and Ravindra Jadeja to draw the match. There was also a picture of Axar Patel, Ajaz Patel, Rachin Ravindra and Ravindra Jadeja standing in that order with their backs to the camera. When read from left to right, the names on the back of their jerseys read, "Axar Patel and Ravindra Jadeja!"

In early 2021, the England cricket team that toured India had two sets of players with similar or rhyming names – batsman Ollie Pope and bowlers Olly Stone and Moeen Ali, in addition to all-rounder Ben Stokes and wicketkeeper Ben Foakes. The 2018-19 England team that toured the West Indies had three players with rhyming names – Ben Stokes, Ben Foakes and Chris Woakes. Interestingly, ahead of the third Test match, all three of them were nursing minor injuries – Stokes with a bruised arm, Foakes with a bruised elbow and Woakes with a knee injury!

The most memorable incident, however, that involved cricketers with rhyming names occurred in the second innings of the Ashes Test between England and Australia at Perth in 1979 when the Aussie fast bowler Dennis Lillee was caught by England's Peter Willey off the bowling of Graham Dilley.

Going beyond names that rhyme, we had cricketers with the same first or last names being involved at the same time. In the third T20 International between India and New Zealand at Kolkata in November 2021, India had Iyer and Iyer (Shreyas and Venkatesh) batting together. When both were dismissed in quick succession, they were followed at the crease by Patel and Patel (Axar and Harshal). In the early part of this decade, we saw three wicketkeepers with similar first names represent their respective countries simultaneously in international cricket – Dinesh Chandimal for Sri Lanka, Dinesh Karthik for India and Denesh Ramdin for the West Indies.

However, the most fascinating of them all was when three players with perhaps the longest last names in first-class cricket were involved in a single dismissal in a Ranji Trophy match between Andhra and Kerala in November 1990. "V Chamundeshwaranath of Andhra was caught by K N Balasubramaniam of Kerala off the bowling of his brother K N Ananthapadmanabhan." This is probably the longest entry in the scorecard of a first-class cricket match. If one were to expand the initials of the Kerala brothers, it would be even longer – K and N standing for Karumanaseri Narayana-Iyer. And guess where that match was played? At Visakhapatnam, most appropriately!

These are but a few pieces of trivia that make cricket, or any other sport, fascinating. Certainly, there's a lot more to come in the future.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Erasing Mahatma Gandhi's name reprehensible

India is a land of villages, and it is no surprise that they are considered the backbone of the country. Mahatma Gandhi had envisioned the importance of Gram Panchayats and Panchayat Raj Institutions, which led to the enactment of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), which has been addressing rural unemployment for years. However, the Union government's decision to repeal and replace it with the VB-G RAM G Act is a concerning move. The Centre's plan to alter the fund-sharing ratio from 90:10 to 60:40 will strain states' finances and undermine federalism. It is disheartening to see the Centre's disregard for the values and principles of Mahatma Gandhi.
M Basavaraj, Davanagere

A new colonialism?

The US military operation in Venezuela has shocked peace-loving nations and raised concerns about a new era of colonialism. The capture of President Maduro is a clear violation of international law and UN charter principles. The international community must act swiftly to uphold sovereignty, democracy, and international law.
S V Venkatakrishnan, Singapore

Perils of PIU

The increasing prevalence of Problematic Internet use (PIU) is concerning and needs to be addressed. PIU can rewire the brain, affecting decision-making and self-control, and has the potential to decrease innovation and advancement in society. Community and personal efforts are needed to promote responsible Internet use, and we must address this problem before it is too late.
Prarthana N Rajendran, Bengaluru

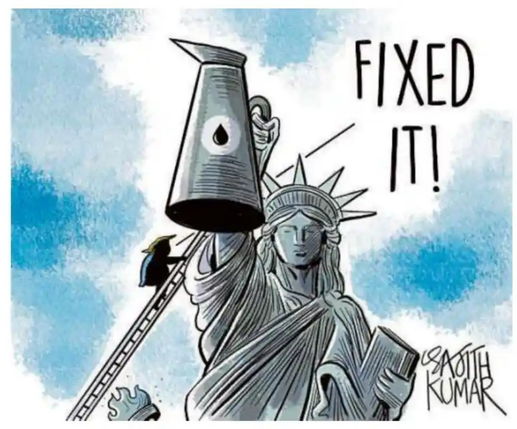
Our readers are welcome to email letters to: **letters@deccanherald.co.in** (only letters emailed – not handwritten – will be accepted). All letters must carry the sender's postal address and phone number.

SPEAK OUT

Can Tamil Nadu progress with an army of corrupt ministers?
Amit Shah,
Union Home Minister

I wish I had an answer to that because I'm tired of answering that question.
Yogi Berra

TO BE PRECISE



IN PERSPECTIVE

How land can be a shared asset

The Karnataka Land Revenue Act can move from record-keeping to asset-building

SOURABH ROY

The Karnataka Land Revenue Act, 1964, was originally enacted to bring together the different regional land laws of the erstwhile Mysore State. Over the last six decades, the law has been amended many times to address issues such as unauthorised occupation, land conversion and urbanisation. These piecemeal changes have left the framework fragmented and outdated. Today, the Act does not adequately respond to modern challenges: rapid urban growth, manipulation of records, unfair valuation and disputes that remain tied up in courts for years.

Land records in Karnataka are still prone to fraud and tampering. The conversion of agricultural land for urban or industrial use is often slow and opaque, giving rise to corruption. Disputes over titles and boundaries take years to resolve, discouraging investment and complicating development projects. If these issues remain unaddressed, Karnataka risks falling behind other states and countries that are modernising their land governance systems.

In recent years, policymakers in Karnataka have initiated discussions on overhauling land revenue governance. Hence, a new Land Revenue Act would allow the state to move beyond incremental fixes and create a forward-looking framework. Such a law would not only improve administration but also turn land into a secure and productive asset.

One area of reform is to treat land as a tradable asset. Global experience shows that land and real estate can be made liquid and transparent through tokenisation, where property is divided into digital shares that can be traded securely. Karnataka can pioneer fractional land ownership within India, giving farmers, cooperatives and small investors new opportunities to unlock value. Alongside this, the state could enable a land revenue securities market, regulated under Sebi guidelines but administered through a state digital land authority, where landowners raise capital by securitising future revenues or leases, rather than resorting to distress sales.

Technology can also improve governance. Predictive models can guide land use planning by identifying the best areas for urban expansion, industrial development or ecological preservation. This would reduce speculative conversions and ensure more rational use of land. Land titles stored on a blockchain ledger would be tamper-proof, ending the cycle of fake entries, forged documents and prolonged disputes. Every parcel of land could be linked to a digital property card with a QR code, making ownership and encumbrances instantly verifiable.

The benefits of such a law are clear. Transparent titles would reduce fraud and land grabbing, while faster and more predictable approvals would cut delays and corruption. Thus, Karnataka would be able to establish itself as a leader in digital land governance in India, drawing lessons from countries that have already adopted tokenisation and modern title systems.

In practical terms, the new Act should establish a Digital Land Authority of Karnataka to oversee blockchain-based records, operate the revenue market and certify surveyors and valuation tools, whereby the Revenue Department would remain the apex authority.

All land records would be digitised and secured on a state blockchain ledger. Each property would carry a digital property card, with satellite imagery and automated validation ensuring accurate and up-to-date entries. The law should provide that digital records are presumed correct, subject only to review by a land tribunal.

On land use, zoning and master planning should be informed by predictive tools. A single-window digital system should handle all conversions and approvals within fixed timelines. Reasons for approvals or rejections must be recorded and made public. Rules should allow mixed-use zoning in suburban areas, enabling farmers to pursue small businesses without fear of violating outdated restrictions. At the same time, landowners who conserve forests or practise sustainable farming should receive tax benefits.

While technology-enabled land revenue governance is promising, it also faces key challenges. Land tokenisation and fractional ownership raise legal issues on title, succession and tenancy rights. Blockchain records, given their reliance on legacy data, can lock in old errors if such data is not rigorously verified first and thus, may exclude small farmers and elderly landowners. AI-based planning, which has often been observed to be opaque and biased, risks weakening local participation. In addition to these, it is foreseeable that the costs involved for such a transition, both financial and institutional, would provoke resistance from vested interests, which may dilute the objectives of this overhaul.

Nonetheless, by treating land as a tradable asset through tokenisation and revenue securities and by adopting AI-driven planning and blockchain-based titles, Karnataka can secure ownership, curb fraud and improve revenue efficiency. At the same time, these reforms will simplify transactions, attract investment and strengthen the Ease of Doing Business. Therefore, a new Land Revenue Act can safeguard administrative integrity while positioning Karnataka as a national leader in technology-driven land governance.

(The writer is Research Fellow at Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy)

Saving the great Indian bustard without sacrificing the power grid

ANIKETAN SUVVI

The Supreme Court's judgment in M K Ranjitsinh & Others vs. Union of India & Others, 2025, on the protection of the great Indian bustard (GIB), is an important environmental ruling in recent years, primarily for its adoption of an ecocentric approach. The GIB's decline is not attributable to a single factor but to a combination of threats: human intrusion into grassland ecosystems, unplanned infrastructure expansion, habitat loss and fragmentation, and fatal collisions with overhead power lines. Classified as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List, current estimates suggest that only about 50–249 mature individuals remain in the wild, with recent observations indicating that the number may be even lower. This makes the GIB one of the rarest birds in the world.

A key aspect of the judgment lies in the Court's interpretation of corporate social responsibility (CSR) under the Companies Act, 2013. The ruling clarifies that CSR must necessarily include corporate environmental responsibility, thereby broadening the notion of 'community' under CSR to include the natural environment. Schedule VII of the Act lists activities that qualify as CSR, including environmental sustainability, ecological balance, protection of flora and fauna, animal welfare, agroforestry, and conservation of natural resources. By placing these activities within the scope of "social responsibility", the law implicitly recognises that human beings neither own the environment nor possess an unrestricted right to exploit it.

This interpretation finds constitutional support in Article 51A(g), which casts a fundamental duty on every citizen to protect and improve the natural environment and to show compassion for living creatures. In this context, corporate spending on environmental protection cannot be viewed merely as charity or benevolence; it is a constitutional obligation. Social responsibility and environmental responsibility are, therefore, inseparable.

The judgment also reflects a significant shift in judicial approach. Moving away from a purely prohibitory approach, the Court has adopted a more scientific and targeted strategy. In April 2021, interim directions were issued restricting overhead transmission lines and advocating underground cabling to safeguard bird populations. The Union government opposed these directions, contending that their blanket application would adversely affect energy development in regions with high solar and wind potential.

In a subsequent order in March 2024, the Court observed that "while balancing two equally crucial goals—the conservation of the GIB on one hand, with the conservation of the environment as a whole on the other—it is necessary to adopt a holistic approach which does not sacrifice either of the two goals at the altar of the other." It cautioned against issuing sweeping directions and, in view of the far-reaching implications of a blanket prohibition on overhead transmission lines, held that the earlier direction needed to be recalled. Accordingly, the Court directed the constitution of an expert committee to balance the non-negotiable need to protect the GIB with the equally pressing need of sustainable development, mainly in light of India's commitment under international conventions.

This ruling reveals a noticeable change in judicial oversight. Rather than direct and extensive intervention, the Court has assumed a restrained and supervisory role, relying on expert committee findings. Environmental constitutionalism does not require courts to replace administrators; it requires them to ensure that executive action remains within constitutional limits and is not arbitrary. In this case, the Court has recognised the limits of judicial power while reaffirming its role as the guardian of the Constitution.

Another dimension of the ruling is its interpretation of Article 21. While courts have long held that the right to life includes the right to a healthy environment, the Supreme Court has gone a step further by recognising the right to be free from the adverse effects of climate change as integral to the fundamental rights guaranteed under Articles 14 and 21.

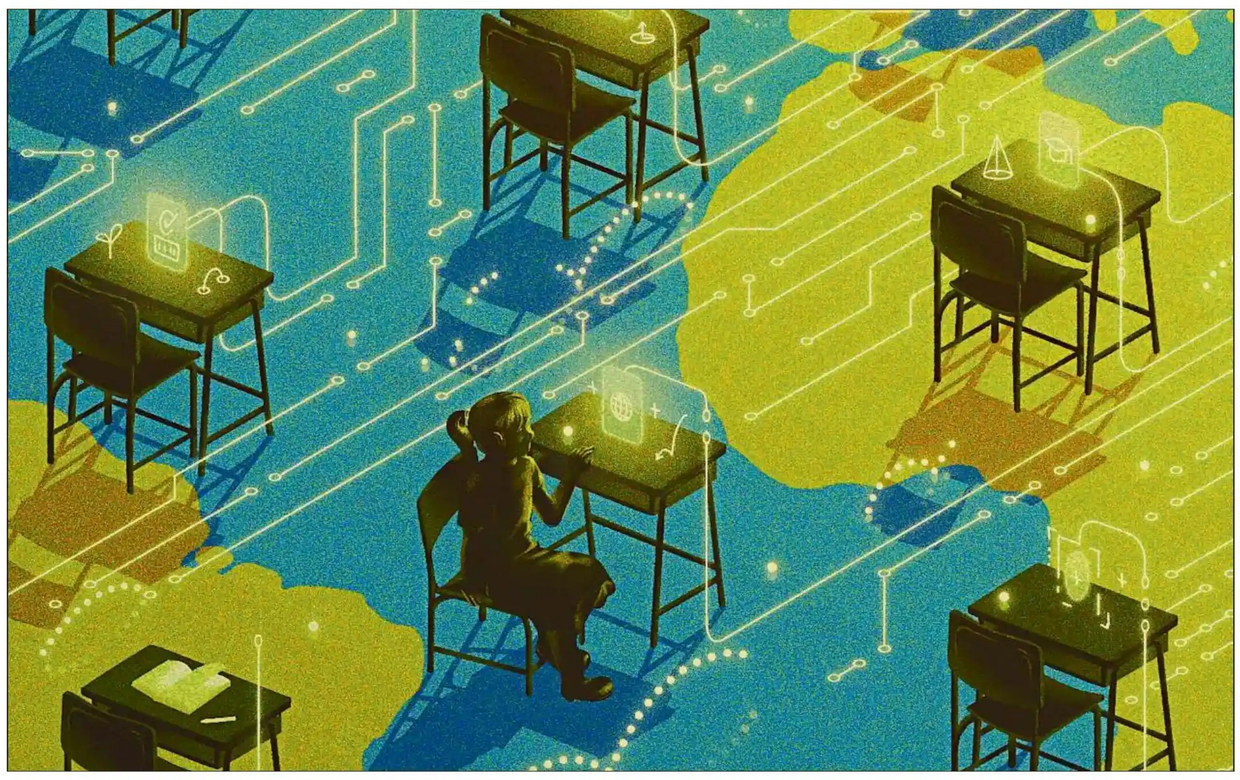
Importantly, the judgment does not elevate renewable energy above biodiversity, nor does it prioritise biodiversity at the cost of renewable energy. Instead, it creates space for their competing coexistence. Yet, concerns regarding enforcement remain. Indian environmental jurisprudence is often ambitious in issuing directions but noticeably weak in implementation. Unlike courts in some developed countries, Indian courts lack robust institutional mechanisms for continuous monitoring beyond periodic compliance reports.

There are broader policy concerns as well. The Court's intervention to mediate between wildlife protection and renewable energy development points to systemic failures in environmental governance and regulatory mechanisms. Ideally, environmental impact assessments under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, should identify ecological risks at the planning stage itself, rather than after projects have already been proposed. The GIB's decline did not happen overnight; it is the outcome of poor planning and the failure to recognise grasslands as important ecosystems.

Beyond judicial oversight, India must integrate ecological data and scientific findings more effectively into infrastructure planning from the outset. EIAs need to be strengthened and treated not as a procedural formality or mere paperwork, but as an effective planning strategy for conservation. For the great Indian bustard, the judgment aims to improve the species' chances of survival – provided its implementation is carried out with seriousness, effectively and efficiently.

(The writer is an advocate)

More governments are rolling out chatbots in schools. Some experts warn the tools could erode teaching and learning



THE NEW YORK TIMES

Tech giants racing to embed AI in schools around the globe

NATASHA SINGER

In early November, Microsoft said it would supply artificial intelligence tools and training to more than 200,000 students and educators in the United Arab Emirates.

Days later, a financial services company in Kazakhstan announced an agreement with OpenAI to provide ChatGPT Edu, a service for schools and universities, for 165,000 educators in Kazakhstan.

Last month, xAI, Elon Musk's AI company, announced an even bigger project with El Salvador: developing an AI tutoring system, using the company's Grok chatbot, for more than one million students in thousands of schools there.

Fuelled partly by American tech companies, governments around the globe are racing to deploy generative AI systems and training in schools and universities.

Some US tech leaders say AI chatbots — which can generate humanlike emails, create class quizzes, analyse data and produce computer code — can be a boon for learning. The tools, they argue, can save teachers time, customise student learning and help prepare young people for an "AI-driven" economy.

But the rapid spread of the new AI products could also pose risks to young people's development and well-being, some children's and health groups warn.

A recent study from Microsoft and Carnegie Mellon University found that popular AI chatbots may diminish critical thinking. AI bots can produce authoritative-sounding errors and misinformation, and some teachers are grappling with widespread AI-assisted student cheating.

Silicon Valley for years has pushed tech tools like laptops and learning apps into classrooms, with promises of improving education access and revolutionising learning.

Still, a global effort to expand school computer access — a programme known as "One Laptop per Child" — did not improve students' cognitive skills or academic outcomes, according to studies by professors and economists of hundreds of schools in Peru. Now, as some tech boosters make similar education access and fairness arguments for AI, children's agencies like UNICEF are urging caution and calling for more guidance for schools.

"With One Laptop per Child, the fallouts included wasted expenditure and poor learning outcomes," Steven Vosloo, a digital policy specialist at UNICEF, wrote in a recent post. "Unguided use of AI systems may actively de-skill students and teachers."

Education systems across the globe are increasingly working with tech companies on AI tools and training programs.

In the United States, where states and school districts typically decide what to teach, some prominent school systems recently introduced popular chatbots for teaching and learning. In Florida alone, Miami-Dade County Public Schools, the nation's third-largest school system, rolled out Google's Gemini chatbot for more than 100,000 high school students. And Broward County Public Schools, the nation's sixth-biggest school district, introduced Microsoft's Copilot chatbot for thousands of teachers and staff members.

Outside the United States, Microsoft in June announced a partnership with the Ministry of Education in Thailand to provide free online AI skills lessons for hundreds of thousands of students. Several months later, Microsoft said it would also provide AI training for 150,000 teachers in Thailand. OpenAI has pledged to make ChatGPT available to teachers in government schools across India.

The Baltic nation of Estonia is trying a different approach, with a broad new national AI education initiative called "AI Leap."

The programme was prompted partly by a recent poll showing that more than 90% of the nation's high-schoolers were already using popular chatbots like ChatGPT for schoolwork, leading to worries that some students were beginning to delegate school assignments to AI.

Estonia then pressed US tech giants to adapt their AI to local educational needs and priorities. Researchers at the University of Tartu worked with OpenAI to modify the company's Estonian-language service for schools so it would respond to students' queries with questions rather than produce direct answers.

Introduced this school year, the "AI Leap" programme aims to teach educators and students about the uses, limits, biases and risks of AI tools. In its pilot phase, teachers in Estonia received training on OpenAI's ChatGPT and Google's Gemini chatbots.

"It's critical AI literacy," said Ivo Visak, the chief executive of the AI Leap Foundation, an Estonian nonprofit that is helping to manage the national education programme. "It's having a very clear understanding that these tools can be useful — but at the same time these tools can do a lot of harm."

Estonia also recently held a national training day for students in some high schools. Some of those students are now using the bots for tasks like generating questions to help them prepare for school tests, Visak said.

"If these companies would put their effort not only in pushing AI products, but also doing the products together with the educational systems of the world, then some of these products could be really useful," Visak added.

This school year, Iceland started its own national AI pilot in schools. Now several hundred teachers across the country are experimenting with Google's Gemini chatbot or Anthropic's Claude for tasks like lesson planning, as they aim to find helpful uses and to pinpoint drawbacks.

Researchers at the University of Iceland will then study how educators used the chatbots.

Students won't use the chatbots for now, partly out of concern that relying on classroom bots could diminish important elements of teaching and learning.

"If you are using less of your brain power or critical thinking — or whatever makes us more human — it is definitely not what we want," said Thordis Sigurdardottir, the director of Iceland's Directorate of Education and School Services.

Tinna Arnardottir and Frida Gylfadottir, two teachers participating in the pilot at a high school outside Reykjavik, say the AI tools have helped them create engaging lessons more quickly.

Arnardottir, a business and entrepreneurship teacher, recently used Claude to make a career exploration game to help her students figure out whether they were more suited to jobs in sales, marketing or management. Gylfadottir, who teaches English, said she had uploaded some vocabulary lists and then used the chatbot to help create exercises for her students.

"I have fill-in-the-blank word games, matching word games and speed challenge games," Gylfadottir said. "So before they take the exam, I feel like they are better prepared."

Gylfadottir added that she was concerned about chatbots producing misinformation, so she vetted the AI-created games and lessons for accuracy before asking her students to try them. Gylfadottir and Arnardottir said they also worried that some students might already be growing dependent on — or overly trusting of — AI tools outside school.

That has made the Icelandic teachers all the more determined, they said, to help students learn to critically assess and use chatbots.

"They are trusting AI blindly," Arnardottir said. "They are maybe losing motivation to do the hard work of learning, but we have to teach them how to learn with AI."

Teachers currently have few rigorous studies to guide generative AI use in schools. Researchers are just beginning to follow the long-term effects of AI chatbots on teenagers and schoolchildren.

"Lots of institutions are trying AI," said Drew Bent, the education lead at Anthropic. "We're at a point now where we need to make sure that these things are backed by outcomes and figure out what's working and what's not working."

The New York Times

Women in retail and the price they pay

TASHIFA SHAKEEL

Walk into any shopping space today—a mall, a franchise store, even a well-designed supermarket—and the first person who greets you is most likely a woman. She informs you about product deals, handles complaints with patience, and manages the mood of the floor.

According to the India Brand Equity Foundation, the Indian retail industry has emerged as one of the most dynamic and fast-paced sectors, contributing over 10% to the country's GDP and 8% to employment. Yet, beyond the polished counters and the neatly organised shelves lies a workplace that often resembles the informal sector more than the formal one it claims to represent.

Women are joining retail in greater numbers because it offers visibility, a professional environment and an entry into the labour market. This reflects a wider national shift. According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey 2023-24, India's female labour force participation has grown from 23.3% in 2017-2018 to 41.7% in 2023-24. A large portion of this workforce, however, still ends up in low-productivity or own-account work.

Many women currently working in retail and sales said they wanted to "be independent and stand on their own feet while also gaining respect", which is what drew them to the sector.

Although retail presents itself through uniforms, attendance systems and defined roles, the protections associated with formal employment are often missing. A former employee at a popular mall in Udaipur said she was often asked to work 12 hours or more, with no fixed end time. Shifts often depended on customer flow, or ongoing sales, and there was a general lack of structure.

The job demands extended hours and constant alertness. Sales targets do not adjust for low-footfall days, and festivals bring longer shifts without guaranteed overtime pay. Workers stand for hours and maintain a pleasant demeanour even when exhausted. Many describe their smiles as part of the job requirement. Emotional labour becomes a silent expectation, but it is rarely considered as a skill deserving higher value.

Benefits that should be standard in the formal sector—such as paid leave and maternity support—are applied inconsistently or discouraged in practice. Women often feel compelled to continue working despite discomfort or personal needs, fearing that absence may be seen as irresponsibility. The insecurity of informal work quietly persists. Contracts can be short, and sudden termination is not unusual, and PF and ESIC benefits, if provided at all, are unevenly implemented, and not all workers are able to avail of their benefits.

Within store hierarchies, gender biases play out clearly. Women dominate the sales floor, while men are more commonly found in managerial and back-end roles. The assumption behind this division is old but persistent: women are "naturally better" at smiling, convincing customers and remaining calm. These expectations may seem harmless, but they create a ceiling. Women gain experience, but not authority.

Customer behaviour adds another layer of vulnerability. Workers report unwanted comments, inappropriate familiarity, and frustration being directed at them during peak hours. When a woman pushes back, she risks being labelled unprofessional. Stores prefer not to upset customers, so workers' discomfort is often invisibilised. Protecting the brand takes priority over protecting the person representing it.

Many women continue working in retail because it provides income and independence. It allows them to navigate public life and build confidence. But whether the industry supports their long-term aspirations remains uncertain. A large proportion of India's women workers remain in arrangements that lack protection. A 2020 study by WIEGO shows that more than 90% of women in the country are employed under informal conditions. Retail may feel like a pathway out of this vulnerability, but it rarely leads women out of it for good.

India's retail market is expected to grow with urban growth and rising consumption. But the workforce most visible in this expansion does not necessarily experience progress in equal measure. Good customer service is essential to brand success, but the contribution of the worker providing that service is often undervalued. If the sector wants to build a skilled and stable workforce, fair pay, proper benefits and clear promotion pathways must exist not just in theory, but in everyday practice.

India's economic ambitions depend on women's workforce participation continuing to rise. Ignoring the conditions in sectors where women are already present undermines this goal.

(The writer is a Research Associate at Work Fair and Free and STEP Academy)

This article is adapted from an unpublished research study conducted by Mona Agrawal and Vignesh M Toby for STEP Academy.

OUR PAGES OF HISTORY

50 YEARS AGO: JANUARY 1976

Unity and discipline vital to ward off threat: PM

New Delhi, January 4
Prime Minister Indira Gandhi today called for creating an atmosphere of unity and discipline to ward off the threat posed to India's security by forces from within and outside. Addressing the general body of the Congress Parliamentary Party on the eve of the Parliament session, she said there were constant efforts by some elements to create dangers, and the nation must remain alert. Mrs. Gandhi regretted that people relied more on what appeared in the foreign press even after years of independence.

25 YEARS AGO: JANUARY 2001

LCA makes flawless maiden flight

Bangalore, Jan 4
It was a dream day with the weather gods playing benevolent and the sun in all its blazing glory, as the country's prestigious LCA kept its tryst with destiny soaring into the skies at around 10.15 am today on its historic, flawless maiden flight. The LCA prototype, built by the Rs 3,000-crore indigenous National Mission Project, after a 15-year effort, was flagged and chased for support by two Mirage 2000 fighters, and was in the air for around 20 minutes before making a perfect landing.

OASIS | PRASANNA S HARIHAR

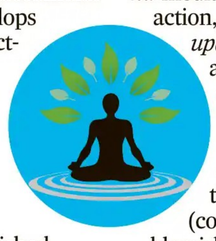
Illusion of the external world

Sri Adi Shankaracharya, some 1,200 years ago, composed *Sri Dakshinamurthy Stotra* comprising of 10 *shlokas*. In the very first one, he has compared our mind to a mirror where the external world is nothing else but a reflection.

"Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of them all?" upon questioned by the evil queen, replied "Snow White!" Such stories in this phenomenal world reflects the brewing of jealousy, and the cause for many vices.

The metaphor is for the eternal Consciousness (or awareness) reflected in the faculty called *Buddhi*, otherwise a function of the mind giving it sentience that is then extended to other functions of the mind, then the body, and to the external world. This reflected consciousness is termed *Chidabhasa*.

An actual mirror that has accumulated dirt on its surface or develops blemishes, distorts the reflected image. Any amount of cleaning its surface will not help improve the quality of the image.



Our minds too have dirt and blemishes in the form of *vasanas* and *samskaras*, causing the original unblemished untainted Consciousness to reflect in a manner resulting in multiplicity – what the human mind views and imagines as an external world. These blemishes too are illumined by the light of awareness.

A few mental purification practices include techniques such as *dhyana*-meditation, *karma yoga*-desireless action, *japa*-chanting of *shlokas*, *upasana*-devotional worship, and others. The blemishes cleaned up thus prepares *buddhi* to absorb the Knowledge of the Self through *sravana* (listening), *manana* (reflection), and *nidhidhyasana* (contemplation). Such an unblemished mirror – our mind, causes Consciousness to be reflected as-is, in full brightness.

This is a state of realisation where the objects in the external world are viewed as projections during the time they are seen by our eyes. With external world obliterated in a realised being, the reflection is as bright as the original, i.e., the image is as clear as the object in front.

The question "Mirror, mirror...." is itself relegated to a moot question, good only for a story. Everything is Consciousness now viewed as perfect reflection, with a conviction that everything seen is only a projection. An inward 'Who Am I' journey is when this question stands tall, the destination where the identity is forged with 'the Self.'

Next time I stand in front of a mirror I shall remember this, would you?

From budget to bills, govt-Oppn showdown set to persist in House

Opposition fears Modi government will continue its 'bulldozer mode' on legislation

SHEMIN JOY
NEW DELHI, DHNS

The government and the Opposition are unlikely to step out of confrontation mode in Parliament in 2026, with the former all set to push its legislative agenda and the latter determined to resist the narrative building.

With Assembly elections due in five states and Union Territories, all eyes will be on the Union Budget, expected to be presented for the first time on a Sunday, February 1, and on the sops the Union government may shower on the states, besides giving a glimpse into its agenda.

The Budget Session will also see the Opposition using the parliamentary platform to raise its voice against the VB G RAM G Act 2025 and demanding the restoration of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).

A slew of bills, including one on 'One Nation, One Election' and another for the removal of top political executives jailed for more than 30 days, are pending before parliamentary panels. It remains to be seen which of these proposed legislations will make its way to Parliament.

The Opposition points out that the Narendra Modi government has a dismal record in sending bills for parliamentary scrutiny. A report by the PRS Legislative Research showed that only 11 of the 42 bills introduced since May 2024 have been sent to a parliamentary committee.

Of this, only one was sent to a Parliamentary Standing Committee, while the others were sent to Joint Committees or Select Committees.

While a host of MPs have demanded that Parliament sit for at least 100 days a year, 2025 witnessed the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha sitting for 62 days. The productivity for the Lok Sabha was 80%, while the Rajya Sabha clocked 83%.

The Monsoon Session was the least productive, with the Lok Sabha recording 29% and the Rajya Sabha 34%, following intense protests over the Special Intensive Revision.

In contrast, the Winter Session registered 103% productivity in the Lok Sabha and 104% in the Rajya Sabha, while the Budget Session saw the Lower House and Upper House clocking 111% and 112% productivity, respectively.

In 2026, the Opposition believes the government will continue persist with its "bulldozer mode" on bills, much like the passage of the VB G RAM G Bill and the SHANTI Bill on the nuclear sector, which were pushed through without parliamentary scrutiny.

More confrontation is anticipated as the higher education legislation — the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, 2025 — is expected to come to the House following examination by a Joint Committee.

Reform-related bills such as the Securities Markets Code Bill, the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Bill and the Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Bill are also likely to be presented before Parliament after committee scrutiny.

TUG-OF-WAR 2026

- All eyes on sops & agenda as budget likely to be presented on Sunday, Feb 1
- Oppn to target VB G RAM G Act, demand MGNREGA restoration
- Key bills like 'One Nation, One Election' pending
- More confrontation expected over Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill

Assam: 4 cops among 6 hurt in Union minister's convoy accident

DIBRUGARH (ASSAM), PTI: At least six people, including four police personnel, were injured on Sunday when the convoy of Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal met with an accident in Assam's Dibrugarh district, officials said.

Dibrugarh Senior Superintendent of Police Gaurav Abhijit Dilip said the accident took place near Hatiali within Chabua police station limits when an escort vehicle from Sonowal's carcade collided with a civilian vehicle.

"As a result, six persons, including four policemen, were injured. They were taken to the hospital in the carcade ambulance," he added.

All the injured are undergoing treatment at Assam Medical College and Hospital and are reported to be out of danger, the SSP said, citing doctors' reports.

The accident took place when Sonowal was on his way to his native house at Bindhakata in Chabua.

Rajya Sabha MP Rameswar Teli was also accompanying Sonowal at the time of the accident.

However, none of the parliamentarians suffered any injuries in the accident and they proceeded towards their destination.

Caste, electoral equations to be in focus in UP Cabinet rejig

SANJAY PANDEY
LUCKNOW, DHNS

Electoral and caste equations are likely to be in focus in the selection of ministers in the Yogi Adityanath cabinet expansion, which is likely to take place in the next few days.

Speculations about the possible cabinet expansion gained momentum after a meeting of the BJP core committee at the CM's residence recently, in which the newly appointed state unit president Pankaj Chaudhary, Adityanath, his two deputies — Keshav Prasad Maurya and Brijesh Pathak — and senior party and RSS functionaries were present.

According to sources, the state cabinet could be expanded around Makar Sankranti. With 54 ministries already in the state council, there are six vacancies in the cabinet.

Sources said western UP could get more representation in the expansion. Influential Gurjar community leader Ashok Kataria could also get a place.

The BJP is likely to include some Brahmin faces in the ministry in an apparent bid to placate the MLAs of the community who had recently held a meeting to discuss what they termed "marginalisation of the community" in the state's caste politics.

Rebel Samajwadi Party MLA Manoj Pandey, a Brahmin, has emerged as a strong contender for a ministerial berth. The other names doing the rounds included those of Sadhvi Niranjana Jyoti, Govind Narayn Shukla and Mahendra Singh.

There is speculation that some ministers might be shifted to party organisation.

Rectify flaws or halt SIR, Mamata urges CEC

West Bengal CM warns of mass disenfranchisement

KOLKATA, DHNS

Mamata Banerjee

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has once again written to Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar, urging him to rectify the glitches in the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in West Bengal and warning that the process continuing with serious irregularities might lead to mass disenfranchisement of eligible voters.

Even as the death of another sick and elderly man at Joynagar is being blamed on the ongoing SIR, Mamata alleged that citizens — including the elderly, infirm, and the seriously ill — were being subjected to needless anxiety and harassment.

The TMC chief, in her third letter to the CEC since the start of the SIR in West Bengal, conveyed her "grave concern" regarding irregularities, procedural violations, and administrative lapses witnessed during the process.

"I strongly urge you to immediately address and rectify the glitches, address the flaws, and make the necessary corrections, failing which this unplanned, arbitrary and ad hoc exercise must be halted," she wrote.

Meanwhile, the TMC continued to criticise the Election Commission (EC) for the SIR in West Bengal, accusing it of working to ensure an advantage for the BJP in the fAssembly elections in the state.

Mamata's heir apparent, TMC general secretary Abhishek Banerjee, recently presented three voters during a rally, alleging that all of them had been declared dead by the EC and struck off the draft electoral rolls.

He alleged that the names of many such electors had been removed from the draft electoral rolls.

"Further, in the name of addressing so-called logical discrepancies — such as spelling errors, age-related variations, etc — the EC has directed verification of documents of all such electors," the CM alleged in her letter to the CEC.

"In cases where these certificates have been issued by authorities in other districts or states, verification is required to be carried out by the issuing authorities. This appears intended to delay the exercise, as such interdistrict or interstate verifications will, in many cases, not be possible to complete within the stipulated time. This is likely to result in the deletion and disenfranchisement of genuine electors," she pointed out.

"Additionally, electors are being summoned for hearings without being informed of the reasons for them, thereby subjecting them to needless anxiety and harassment," alleged the CM.

TN, West Bengal will join NDA's list of victories: Shah

PUDUKOTTAI (TAMIL NADU), PTI: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday expressed confidence that the NDA would emerge victorious in the Assembly polls due this year in Tamil Nadu and West Bengal.

Addressing a mega BJP rally here, Shah listed out the BJP-NDA's wins since 2024, including a third consecutive win in Haryana and said it was now the turn of Tamil Nadu and West Bengal.

Slamming the ruling DMK over alleged corruption, he asked if the state can progress with an "army of corrupt ministers."

"Can Tamil Nadu's progress happen with such an army of corrupt ministers. There is 20 per cent corruption cut money. The state economy is running on debts and liquor sales," Shah charged.

He targeted the DMK for dynasty rule and said a dream to perpetuate it would not come true and the time has come to put an end to family politics in Tamil Nadu.

Stalin announces Rs 3,000 cash gift for harvest festival 'Pongal'

CHENNAI, PTI: Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin on Sunday announced a Rs 3,000 cash gift for the harvest festival 'Pongal' to rice category ration card holders and to all families that reside in rehabilitation camps for Sri Lankan Tamils.

Ahead of Pongal, a gift hamper comprising one kg each of rice and sugar and one sugarcane in addition to a cash gift of Rs 3,000 (to each family that has a rice-card) and a dhoti and a saree would be distributed through PDS outlets to beneficiaries, the CM announced.

The cash gift and festival hamper were aimed at facilitating a grand celebration of Pongal, a festival celebrated by the Tamil people since time immemorial, the government statement said.

It would together entail an expenditure of around Rs 6,936.17 crore, the statement added.

As MGNREGA becomes history...

Rural job scheme operational in 741 districts (barring Delhi, Chandigarh), 2.69 lakh panchayats

COVERAGE

15+ crore families with 26+ crore beneficiaries

12.15 crore active workers

4.81 lakh differently abled employed

	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26*
Approved labour budget	Rs 285.33 cr	Rs 307.24 cr	Rs 243.59 cr	210.47 cr
Person days generated	293.7 cr	308.66 cr	286.18 cr	172.73 cr

*till now in 2025-26

SC/ST participation in 2025-26: 36.67%

Women's share in 2025-26: 56.79%

	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Households provided employment	6.18 cr	5.99 cr	5.78 cr	4.78 cr
Households completing 100 days of employment	35.96 lakh	44.94 lakh	40.70 lakh	7.78 lakh
Average days of employment per household	47.83	52.08	50.24	36.32

EXPENDITURE IN LAST FIVE FISCALS

- Rs 1.53 lakh cr Water conservation works
- Rs 39,065 cr Plantation activities
- Rs 73,138 cr Rural connectivity
- Rs 13,037 cr Animal husbandry
- Rs 7,196 cr Rural sanitation
- Rs 2,673 cr Anganwadi centres

SOURCE: MINISTRY OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT'S PRESENTATION TO PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND PANCHAYATI RAJ

Cong sets up panel to monitor 'Save MGNREGA' protests

NEWDELHI, DHNS: A day after announcing the "MGNREGA Bachao Sangram", the Congress on Sunday announced a committee under senior leader Ajay Maken — with Jairam Ramesh and Priyank Kharge among its members — to monitor the nationwide agitation seeking restoration of the UPA-era rural employment guarantee programme.

The other members in the coordination committee are Sandeep Dikshit, Udit Raj, Anasuya Seethakka, Dipika Pandey Singh, Sunil Pawar, and Manish Sharma.

Heads of all frontal organisations as well as chairpersons of the Congress' OBC, Scheduled Castes, Minorities, and Adivasi departments, besides those from the Kisan Congress, will also be members of the coordination committee, which will "oversee, guide, and monitor" the implementation of the "MGNREGA Bachao Sangram".

The decision to hold nationwide protests was taken at a meeting of the Congress Working Committee held here on December 27.

On Saturday, the Congress announced a 45-day agitation programme starting from January 10.

The programme is expected to start with press conferences in districts on January 10, followed by a one-day fast at district headquarters or near Gandhi or Ambedkar statues.

Phase 2 of the protest, between January 12 and January 30, will reportedly see panchayat-level meetings; distribution of letters by Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and top leader Rahul Gandhi to all MGNREGA workers and gram pradhans, among others; and Assembly-level meetings.

It is expected to culminate on January 30, the anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi's martyrdom, with peaceful sit-in protests at the ward level.

Phase 3, from January 31 to February 25, will reportedly involve district-level dharnas until February 6 and a state-level gherao of Assembly buildings, Governors' residences, or Central government offices between February 7 and 15.

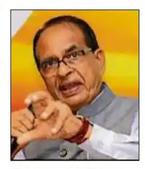
The Congress will also organise four major rallies across the country between February 16 and 25.

Corruption rampant under MGNREGA: Chouhan

AJITH ATHRADY
NEW DELHI, DHNS

Accusing the Congress of spreading misinformation about the VB-G RAM G scheme, Union Rural Development Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Sunday alleged that corruption was rampant under MGNREGA.

Taking a dig at the Congress for its decision to launch a 'Save MGNREGA Movement', Chouhan charged the Opposition with attempting to shield corruption rather than protect rural workers.



Shivraj Singh Chouhan

Speaking to reporters, the minister said the 'Viksit Bharat-G RAM G Yojana' promises stronger safeguards, greater transparency and expanded benefits.

"My appeal to the Congress is that it should not spread misinformation and lies," he said.

"The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act had become synonymous with corruption. Under social audits conducted by gram sabhas, there were more than 10,51,000 complaints. The same work was repeated, work was done by machines and money was siphoned off in the name of cleaning canals and roads. Thirty percent of workers were above 60," Chauhan alleged.

Cong camp in Kerala to chalk out poll strategy

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, DHNS: A two-day Kerala Congress leadership camp began in Wayanad on Sunday to chalk out action plans for the Assembly polls. The party has already announced a target of 100 in the 140-member House.

KC Venugopal

The meeting is happening amidst overt and covert moves by many, including veteran leaders, to contest, especially since the party's hopes of returning to power in the state after 10 years have brightened after the recent local-body elections.

AICC general secretaries Deepa Dasmunshi and K C Venugopal, Opposition leader V D Satheesan, Congress Working Committee members Shashi Tharoor and Ramesh Chennithala, and Kerala Congress president Sunny Joseph are among the 150 leaders attending the two-day session.

The key objectives are to prepare a "Mission 2026" action plan and initiate talks on candidate selections.

Senior leaders are likely to be given district-wise charges. Talks on whether sitting MPs should contest may also come up amid reports that many — including Venugopal — had expressed a keen interest in contesting in the state election.

Hindu vote banks worry CPM in Kerala

ARJUN RAGHUNATH
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, DHNS

POLL HEADACHE

- LDF rift deepens over ties with SNDP leader
- Hindu vote banks at stake as elections approach
- NSS' 'right distance' approach on Sabarimala gold heist issue seen as unfavourable to LDF

Javadekar meets Vellappally

Triggering political speculation in Kerala ahead of the Assembly polls, BJP Kerala in-charge and former Union minister Prakash Javadekar met SNDP Yogam general secretary Vellappaly Natesan on Sunday. The SNDP Yogam represents the Ezhava community, the largest Hindu group in the state.

He reporters that the BJP's victory in the Thiruvananthapuram corporation would open the door for the party to come to power in Kerala, as it did in Gujarat after winning the Ahmedabad municipal corporation.

Aggravating differences within the LDF in Kerala over its ties with Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP) general secretary Vellappally Natesan, and the Nair Service Society's (NSS) decision to maintain a 'right distance' approach towards political parties on the Sabarimala Ayyappa temple gold heist issue, appear to have triggered concern within the LDF over Hindu vote banks as the Assembly elections approach.

The SNDP represents the Hindu-Ezhava community, the largest Hindu group in Kerala, accounting for 22% of the state's population. The NSS represents the Hindu-Nair community, the second-largest group, comprising 12% of the population.

Though Ezhava votes have traditionally been considered pro-LDF, the last couple of general elections saw a significant shift of this support towards the BJP. CPM leaders themselves cautioned against the trend, and Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's closeness with Natesan in recent months is widely considered as an attempt to plug the flow of Ezhava votes to the BJP.

However, Natesan's communally sensitive remarks targeting the Muslim community seem to have backfired on the LDF in the recent local body elections. As a result, the CPI — the second-largest party in the LDF — has openly opposed Natesan, sparking a heated exchange with CPI state secretary Benoy Viswam.

Despite this, the CPM leadership is unwilling to sever ties with Natesan. Both Pinarayi and CPM state secretary MV Govindan have refused to endorse CPI's criticism of him.

The NSS has announced its 'right distance' policy on the Sabarimala issue. NSS general secretary G Sukumaran Nair clarified that while the organisation would maintain equidistance from all parties, on the matter of the Sabarimala gold heist, it would adhere to the 'right distance' approach.

With several CPM leaders already implicated in the Sabarimala case, the NSS' stance is seen as unfavourable for the CPM-led LDF.

Nair voters, traditionally considered pro-Congress, have also been visibly shifting towards the BJP. However, Congress camps are hopeful that they will benefit from anti-incumbency against the LDF government.

CPM camps point out that even though the NSS general secretary made open remarks against the party on polling day in 2021 over the Sabarimala temple women's entry issue, the CPM still returned to power.

Oppn slams Maha Yuti over wins in Maha local polls

MRITYUNJAY BOSE
MUMBAI, DHNS

A woman holds a poster of PM Narendra Modi and CM Devendra Fadnavis before a Maha Yuti alliance rally ahead of BMC elections in Mumbai on Sunday. PTI

As the campaign over the elections to 29 municipal corporations gathers further momentum, the Opposition on Sunday stepped up its attack on the Maha Yuti with MNS chief Raj Thackeray targeting the BJP for taking different positions on unopposed wins in Maharashtra and West Bengal.

The Opposition parties also continue to flag the issue of Maharashtra Assembly Speaker Rahul Narwekar, who has been accused of violating the model code of conduct, interfering in the nomination process and tampering with CCTV footage linked to the exercise.

Over 68 candidates of the ruling alliance won the elections unopposed, including 44 of the BJP, 22 of Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena and 2 of Ajit Pawar-led NCP. In the multi-cornered fight, 2,869 seats are up for grabs in 29 municipal corporations, including Mumbai.

The Thackeray cousins, Uddhav and Raj, slammed the BJP and the State Election Commission over the issue. "If the SEC has courage, it should cancel elections where candidates were chosen unopposed, initiate a poll process again in those wards," said Uddhav, the Shiv Sena (UBT) head.

He said that candidates getting elected unopposed is like denying voters, especially Gen Z, the chance to exercise their franchise. He also demanded the immediate dismissal of Narwekar.

Meanwhile, Raj pointed out that the BJP had gone to the Supreme Court against the unopposed elected candidates of West Bengal. "I want to know what the same party thinks of unopposed elected candidates of Maha Yuti now," he said.

Responding to the charges of misuse of election machinery, political power and money, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said: "They can certainly go to court, but the people's court has elected us. Even if they (opposition parties) move the court, the people's mandate will prevail in court."

Delhi blast accused used 'ghost' SIMs to contact Pakistani handlers

Centre mandates messaging apps must be tied to active SIMs after probe findings

SRINAGAR/NEW DELHI, PTI

Investigations into the "white-collar" terror module linked to the blast near Delhi's Red Fort on November 10 last year show that highly educated doctors used a sophisticated web of "ghost" SIM cards and encrypted apps to coordinate with Pakistani handlers, officials claimed on Sunday.

The outcome of the investigations essentially formed the basis for the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) to issue a sweeping directive on November 28 last year, mandating that app-based communication services like WhatsApp, Telegram and Signal must be continuously linked to an active, physical SIM card within the device.

The officials said the probe into the "white-collar" terror module and the blast led to a web of "ghost" SIM cards being used by the arrested doctors, including Muzammil Ganaie, Adeel Rather and others, as part of a tactical "dual-phone" protocol to evade security agencies.

Each accused, including Dr Umar-un-Nabi, who was killed while driving the explosives-laden vehicle near the Red Fort, carried two to three mobile handsets, they said.

The accused carried one "clean" phone registered in their own names for routine use to avoid suspicion, and one was the "terror phone" used exclusively for WhatsApp and Telegram communication with their handlers in Pakistan (identified by code-names 'Ukasa', 'Faizan', and 'Hashmi').

The SIM cards for these secondary devices were issued in the names of unsuspecting civilians whose Aadhaar details were misused, the officials said. J&K Police unearthed a separate racket where SIMs were issued using fake Aadhaar cards, they added.

The security agencies noted a disturbing trend where these compromised SIMs remained active on messaging platforms across the border in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) or Pakistan. By exploiting features that allow messaging apps to run without a physical SIM in the device, the handlers were able to direct the module to learn IED assembly via YouTube and plot "hinterland" attacks.

The Centre has invoked the Telecommunications Act, 2023, and Telecom Cyber Security Rules to "safeguard the integrity of the telecom ecosystem", which includes a rule that within 90 days, all Telecommunication Identifier User Entities (TIUEs) must ensure their apps function only if an active SIM is installed in the device.

Haryana women's commission takes cognisance of gang-rape

FARIDABAD, PTI: The Haryana State Commission for Women on Sunday took cognisance of the gang-rape of a 25-year-old woman in Faridabad, officials said.

The commission chairperson, Renu Bhatia, has asked the Faridabad police commissioner to submit a detailed report on the incident.

"I have spoken to the victim's family, and we will provide all necessary assistance to her," Renu said.

Meanwhile, Dr Amit Yadav, who is treating the victim at his private hospital, said that her condition is stable.

According to the police details, the woman went to her friend's house in Sector 23, Faridabad, on Monday evening last week. While returning home, she took an auto-rickshaw to the NIT 2 Chowk and then walked to the Metro Chowk.

As she stood there around midnight to take an auto to get to her home, the two accused, the driver of a private hospital's ambulance, allegedly offered her a lift, they said.

However, instead of taking her to the destination, they allegedly drove towards Gurugram and raped her inside the moving vehicle, they added.

She was driven around through the night and thrown out of the vehicle near Raja Chowk in Faridabad around 3 am on Tuesday. The survivor was later admitted to a private hospital, police said.

The two accused have since been arrested.

Kerala couple says 'I do' with Constitution

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, DHNS

A couple in Kerala who limited their marriage ceremony to the exchange of the Constitution are being widely hailed for their novel initiative.

As part of their literary efforts around the Constitution, they chose to turn their wedding into an awareness event.

Sheethal PS from Kollam and Jithin Krishna from Palakkad tied the knot by signing the register at the Nenmara sub-registrar office under the Special Marriage Act. The simple function was attended by a few close relatives and friends. The couple signed a marriage agreement, exchanged copies of the Constitution and distributed pamphlets promoting constitutional awareness.

Sheethal and Jithin. (FACEBOOK)

Sheethal, a teacher by profession, has long been engaged in Constitution awareness activities, while Jithin serves as an official in the state revenue department. Sheethal is also an active member of the Constitution Literacy Council.

With a conviction that awareness of the Constitution is more important than ever, the couple chose to make their marriage ceremony a novel awareness event. They expressed hope that many others would follow their example.

Appreciating the initiative, Congress MP Shashi Tharoor wrote in a social media post, "Wishing them all happiness as they uphold each other's fundamental rights and follow the Directive Principles in bringing up their kids."

The couple has since been widely lauded on social media for their unique effort to spread constitutional awareness.

Year after SC nod, no ad-hoc judges appointed in HCs to tackle pendency

NEW DELHI, PTI: No ad-hoc judges have been appointed in high courts so far to tackle pending criminal cases, nearly a year after the Supreme Court cleared the decks for it, as the high courts have not shown interest.

According to people aware of the procedure to appoint SC and HC judges, none of the 25 HCs have recommended names for appointment as ad-hoc judges.

Concerned over the pendency of over 18 lakh criminal cases, the top court had on January 30, 2025, allowed the high courts to appoint ad-hoc judges, not exceeding 10% of the court's total sanctioned strength.

However, the Union law ministry is yet to get any recommendation from any of the HC collegiums to appoint retired judges on an ad hoc basis.

Article 224A of the Constitution allows the appointment of retired judges as ad-hoc judges in high courts to help manage case backlog.

Except in one case, there is no precedent of appointing retired judges as ad-hoc HC judges, officials said.

In a judgment on April 20, 2021, on the appointment of ad-hoc judges in the high courts, the top court had imposed certain conditions. However, later, a special SC bench comprising then Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justices B R Gavai (another former CJI) and Surya Kant (incumbent CJI) had relaxed certain conditions and kept some in abeyance.

The verdict, which was authored by former Chief Justice S A Bobde, directed retired high court judges to be appointed as ad-hoc ones for a period of two to three years to clear the backlog.

MISCELLANY

◆COMICS◆

Blondie

WHAT DOES THE FALL AGENDA LOOK LIKE, BUMSTEAD?
HUH? OH! GOT IT, BOSS!
TODAY IS SEPTEMBER 26TH! ONLY 5 MORE DAYS UNTIL PIZZA MONTH!
STRESSFUL DAY?
YEP! I MANAGED TO CRUNCH THE FALL NUMBERS, BUT THE BOSS WAS IN ONE OF HIS MOODS AGAIN!

Hagar The Horrible

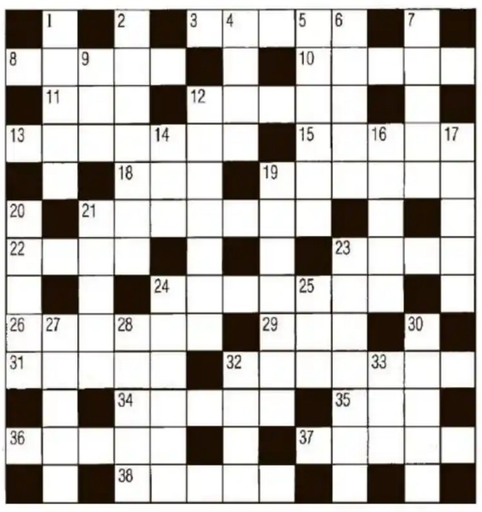
Beetle Bailey

Peanuts

OKAY, I'LL TAKE THE FRONT PAGE, THE SPORTS SECTION AND THE EDITORIAL PAGE...
I'LL ALSO TAKE THE BOOK REVIEWS, THE THEATER SECTION AND THE COMICS...
AND I'LL TAKE THE FOOD PAGE AND THE SOCIETY COLUMNS
YOU CAN HAVE THE BIRD NEWS

Marvin

CROSSWORD CHALLENGE 12324



CRYPTIC

ACROSS
3 In general, black marks (5)
8 Cruel king, but a hero to many (5)
10 Really pointless meeting? (5)
11 Fair game? (3)
12 Weedy fathead at the bar (5)
13 Very much so, but not unspeakably (7)
15 The dramatic bits (5)
18 A supportive fellow? (3)
19 First in the world! (6)
21 It's singularly useful when you want to hold hands (7)
22 Call for some pieces of ice (4)
23 He gets publicity as top man (4)
24 A bag of broken latches (7)
26 Charlie, neglected, gets surly (6)
29 A drink to enable you to eat? (3)
31 Being rash has to bring the ultimate penalty (5)
32 A climbing aid, naturally (7)
34 Not a soft word (5)
35 Cowards at heart showing great fight (3)
36 Where I step out wearing skis (5)
37 Pay out the Poles at the plant (5)
38 Shot for writing? (5)

DOWN
1 Big and strong, he gets a bit crafty (5)
2 Irish lad gone wrong (7)
4 Army manoeuvres get her agitated (4)
5 But just one athlete can make this jump! (6)
6 Food's not all the same, young man! (5)
7 Wherein life has no ups and downs? (5)
9 In truth, it's monotonous (3)
12 To travel a distance by air makes you giddy (7)
14 Organise with dash? (3)
16 A priest, self-centred, has fun (5)
17 A little room to look into (5)
19 Picked at the polls (7)
20 The question of who sounds a sorceress? (5)
21 Without taking minutes to get round a bend? (5)
23 Chief method of movement? (7)
24 Fashions that seem a bit nasty to the French? (6)
25 A layer of rich enamel (3)
27 One's right to be paid, perhaps, without delay (5)
28 Rigging a test, say (5)
30 Starting no end of terrible strife (5)
32 Swimmer's eccentric aunt (4)
33 Run past! (3)

ACROSS
3 Iraqi currency (5)
8 Easily frightened (5)
10 Purchaser (5)
11 Illuminated (3)
12 Faithful (5)
13 Six-sided figure (7)
15 Prison rooms (5)
18 Greyhound, say (3)
19 Serving dish (6)
21 Monotonous (7)
22 Egg-shaped (4)
23 DNA unit (4)
24 Of the sides (7)
26 Tooth covering (6)
29 Flipper (3)
31 Bible prophet (5)
32 Blunt weapons (7)
34 Of tides (5)
35 Roll of banknotes (3)
36 Egypt's capital (5)
37 Seraglio (5)
38 Beginning (5)

DOWN
1 Heaps (5)
2 Fortified building (7)
4 Golf club (4)
5 Counting frame (6)
6 Measuring stick (5)
7 Beautiful girl (5)
9 Mingle, blend (3)
12 According to reason (7)
14 Deity (3)
16 Horizontal (5)
17 Scornful expression (5)
19 Melodious (7)
20 Tribal badge (5)
21 Spanish snacks (5)
23 Clear a path! (7)
24 Injury, wound (6)
25 To free (3)
27 Wanderer (5)
28 French underground (5)
30 Senior, older (5)
32 Gateau (4)
33 Hearing organ (3)

SOLUTIONS TO CROSSWORD 2661

ACROSS: 1 Rustle, 4 Shoulder, 9 Dearth, 10 Question, 12 Cold feet, 13 Geneva, 15 Lear, 16 Closed book, 19 Take as read, 20 Stop, 23 Arcade, 25 All the go, 27 Go places, 28 Sparse, 29 Striking, 30 Gratis.

DOWN: 1 Radical, 2 Small talk, 3 Let off, 5 Haul, 6 Unsteady, 7 Drive, 8 Ransack, 11 Declare, 14 Usually, 17 On the trot, 18 Laid back, 19 Tear gas, 21 Process, 22 Stupor, 24 Caper, 26 Mean.

◆SU-DO-KU-6795◆

3	7		8					4
		1					9	
		9				3	8	
				6	5		7	
6			2		7			8
	1		3	8				
	5	4				2		
	2					6		
1					2		4	5

hard

5	1	9	4	3	7	8	2	6
4	2	6	1	8	9	7	3	5
8	7	3	5	6	2	4	9	1
2	4	5	3	7	6	1	8	9
9	8	7	2	1	4	6	5	3
6	3	1	9	5	8	2	4	7
7	5	2	6	4	3	9	1	8
3	6	4	8	9	1	5	7	2
1	9	8	7	2	5	3	6	4

SOLUTION TO 6794

To solve the puzzle: To solve a su-do-ku puzzle, every digit from1 to 9 must appear in each of the nine vertical columns, in each of the nine horizontal rows, and in each of the nine boxes.

SCRABBLE™

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							5th Letter Triple	RACK 1
D2	C3	N1	N1	I1	I1	A1		
							Triple Word Score	RACK 2
I1	C3	I1	U1	T1	C3	R1		
							Triple Word Score	RACK 3
R1	B3	W4	W4	E1	O1	M3		
							Triple Word Score	RACK 4
N1	S1	L1	T1	A1	U1	P3		

PAR SCOR 215-225
by JUDD

FOUR RACK TOTAL
TIME LIMIT: 20 MIN

DIRECTIONS: Make a 2- to 7-letter word from the letters in each row. Add points of each word, using scoring directions at right. 7-letter words get 50-point bonus. "Blanks" used as any letter have no point value. All Judd's words are in the Collins English Dictionary. JUDD'S SOLUTION TOMORROW

SATURDAY'S SOLUTION

J8	O1	L1	T1	E1	R1	S1	RACK 1 =	64
T1	A1	M3	A1	S1	H4	A1	RACK 2 =	86
G2	R1	O1	U1	T1	Y4		RACK 3 =	20
S1	U1	T1	U1	R1	E1		RACK 4 =	6
							JUDD'S TOTAL	176

PAR SCORE 115-125

JUMBLE

THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME
By David L. Hoyt and Jeff Knurek

Unscramble these Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

LASDA

BIOLM

LYSMFE

CRREOG

You look like a little gentleman in my hat.
Oh my gosh! Let me get my camera! He is so cute in that!
I look just like you, Grandpa!
6/26
WHEN HE PUT ON HIS GRANDFATHER'S VINTAGE SOFT FELT HAT, HE LOOKED ---

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Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

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Answer here: " " (Answers tomorrow)

Saturday's Jumbles: GRIPE INPUT IRONIC HUMANE
Answer: Because of nearby thunderstorms, flight arrival times were now — UP IN THE AIR

HITORI-3249

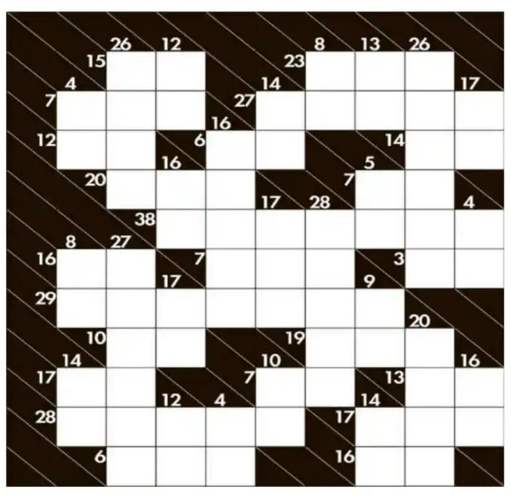
8	4	7	5	8	3	7	6
6	7	4	8	2	5	8	1
8	6	4	7	7	1	4	5
3	5	2	8	4	6	3	7
8	3	1	3	6	8	5	8
1	8	8	3	5	2	6	8
2	8	6	4	8	3	4	5
4	8	5	8	1	7	3	6

SOLUTION TO 3248

8	■	4	■	5	■	1	6
2	3	8	5	7	4	6	■
7	■	6	■	2	3	5	4
5	7	■	8	4	■	3	■
■	4	3	■	8	5	2	1
3	■	7	4	■	2	■	5
6	8	5	■	3	■	7	2
■	5	2	6	1	7	8	■

To solve the puzzle: Eliminate numbers by filling in squares so that remaining cells in that row or column do not repeat that number more than once. Filled-in cells cannot be horizontally or vertically adjacent. The un-filled cells must form a single component connected horizontally and vertically.

KAKURO- 3249



SOLUTION TO 3248

To solve the puzzle: Put a number from 1 through 9 in a cell. No zeros. A number in a cell separated by diagonal line tells the sum of numbers in consecutive cells at its right or downward. No number may appear more than once in consecutive cells.

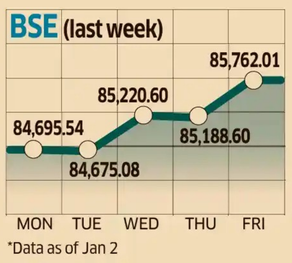
SU DO KU X - 3787

■					6			■
	1			4	2	6	■	3
		■				1		
			■		5	7		
			■			8	5	
			■		■			
	4	■		3		■		
	7	2					■	5
■	3		4				8	■

SOLUTION TO 3786

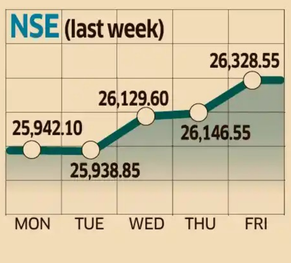
5	1	4	8	9	3	2	7	6
9	3	7	1	2	6	8	4	5
8	2	6	5	4	7	1	9	3
1	7	8	4	3	5	6	2	9
4	9	2	6	7	8	5	3	1
3	6	5	9	1	2	4	8	7
7	5	3	2	8	1	9	6	4
6	8	9	3	5	4	7	1	2
2	4	1	7	6	9	3	5	8

To solve the puzzle: The objective is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column, each 3x3 box and each shaded diagonal line contains the same number only once.



*Data as of Jan 2

TOP GAINERS		TOP LOSERS	
NTPC	6.84%	ITC	-13.11%
TRENT	3.06%	KOTAKBANK	-0.26%
M&M	2.49%	AXISBANK	-0.09%
POWERGRID	2.46%	BAJAJFINSV	-0.03%
ETERNAL	2.23%		



TOP GAINERS		TOP LOSERS	
NTPC	8.64%	ITC LTD	-13.39%
TATA STEEL	8.14%	HCL TECH	-1.25%
JSW STEEL	7.89%	DR REDDY'S	-1.04%
COAL INDIA	6.40%	BAJAJ FIN	-0.96%
INDUSIND BK	6.19%	INFOSYS L	-0.95%

Sensex (52-week)
Jan 2, 2025: 79,943.71 | Jan 2, 2026: 85,762.01 | 7.28%

Nifty (52-week)
Jan 2, 2025: 24,188.65 | Jan 2, 2026: 26,328.55 | 8.85%

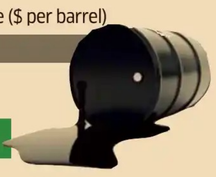
10-year Bond yield 6.60%

Exchange Rates*

Dollar	₹90.20	SGD	₹69.92
Pound	₹121.35	Yen (100 units)	₹57.42
Euro	₹105.84		

*Price at which banks sell

Crude Oil Rate ($ per barrel)
BRENT CRUDE
$60.75*
-0.16%
*Rate as of Jan 2



Bengaluru fuel pump price*

(Retail)
Petrol* ₹102.92 ₹-0.06%
Diesel* ₹90.99 ₹-0.05%
*Rates as of Jan 2 #Rate change compared with yesterday

Commodity watch

COFFEE

Category	Rate (Rs per 50 kg)*
Arabica Parchment	₹25800 - 26300
Arabica Cherry	₹13400 - 15000
Robusta Parchment	₹15500 - 16000
Robusta Cherry	₹9500 - 10250

*Rates as on Jan 2

Other Commodities
Silkworm cocoon (Rs per kg)*

Bivoltine (BV)	₹740
Cross Breed (CB)	₹701

*Average rates as on Jan 2

'Tax hike raises risk of smuggling tobacco products, revenue loss'

NEW DELHI, PTI: An unprecedented tax hike, coupled with a new excise duty structure on tobacco, could lead to a surge in illicit trade of cigarettes and result in significant tax revenue losses for the country, experts said.

Earlier this week, the Finance Ministry notified amendments to the Central Excise Act, imposing an excise duty ranging from Rs 2,050 to Rs 8,500 per 1,000 sticks based on cigarette length, effective February 1. This duty will be over and above 40% GST.

This would imply the overall tax hike of 60-70%, varying across lengths. Currently, the overall tax of about 50-55%, depending on the length. The unexpected tax hikes proposed in the transition from the GST compensation cess to excise on demerit goods have triggered concern of increased smuggling of tobacco products and cigarettes, Think Change Forum Secretary General Ranganath Tannir said.

"Public finance theory is clear that excessive taxation of inelastic goods fuels illicit trade, not compliance. This risk is amplified in India, where cigarettes are already among the most unaffordable globally, as measured by the WHO's affordability indicators. Making them even more expensive will not suppress demand, but redirect it — most likely towards smuggled and illegal products — undermining revenue," he said. According to J P Morgan's Asia Pacific Equity Research report, a higher rate for the King Size Filter Tip (KSFT) segment implies increased risk of consumer down-trading to cheaper variants, and may also induce an increase in the offtake of illicit cigarettes.

In India, illicit tobacco already accounts for about 26% of the total market, making it the fourth-largest market for smuggled tobacco globally. Nomura said, "High taxes on cigarettes, while aimed at reducing consumption, have unintended consequences of fueling growth of illicit cigarettes and pushing consumers towards cheaper, non-tax paid smuggled cigarettes."

Citing a report by the Tobacco Institute of India (TII), Jefferies said the industry body has requested the government for a review, as a wider legal price gap could help non-duty-paid cigarettes, which will also result in tax leakage.

International experience from Australia demonstrates how overly aggressive tobacco taxation can backfire by fuelling organised crime. Repeated tax hikes between 2012 and 2020 drove cigarette prices sharply higher, triggering a surge in illicit tobacco from under 2% to around 14% of the market.

Meesho rides high on e-commerce boom in non-metros

Operates on affordability, relatability, and community-driven discovery

UMA KANNAN
BENGALURU, DHNS

Last month, Bengaluru-headquartered e-commerce company Meesho made a strong stock market debut with its shares listing at Rs 161.20 on the BSE, a premium of over 45% over the IPO price of Rs 111. Earlier, its IPO (Initial Public Offering) ended with a total subscription of 79 times, which according to brokerage firms, was one of the highest subscription figures among large-scale new-age stock listings in recent years. What are the key factors behind this strong performance?

Analysts attribute this performance to SoftBank-backed Meesho's asset-light model and penetration in tier-2,3 and 4 markets. The value-focused e-commerce marketplace serves consumers from diverse income backgrounds. "This is made possible by providing a low-cost channel for sellers, which in turn allows them to offer a wide assortment of products at affordable prices to consumers," the company stated in its Draft Red Herring Prospectus (DRHP). The company monetises through services that are provided to sellers such as order fulfilment, advertising and data insights.

"Meesho's growth in tier 2 and 3 markets comes from solving very real, everyday problems — price sensitivity, limited brand access, and comfort with local languages. Its low-cost assortment, simple app experience, and strong word-of-mouth through social sharing have helped it penetrate households that were earlier hesitant about e-commerce. From a marketing lens, Meesho has positioned itself less as a 'platform' and more as a familiar shopping habit, which works strongly in non-metro India," Media Care Brand Solutions Director Yasin Hamidani said.

Unlike large e-commerce players that focus on selection depth and premium branding, Meesho operates on affordability, relatability, and community-driven discovery, Hamidani added.

"The reseller and social commerce angle build trust faster in smaller towns, where recommendations matter more than ads. Meesho also avoids heavy brand clutter, keeping communication simple, local, and benefit-led — something most big players struggle to execute consistently," he said.

Game changer in retail
meesho
136.40 million to 198.77 million
Growth in Meesho's Annual Transacting Users between fiscals 2023 & 2025
1,024.34 million to 1,834.40 million
Growth in Placed Orders during the same period
213.17 million
Growth in Annual Transacting Users in the last 12-month period ended June 30, 2025; placed orders grew to 2,022.48 mn
16.86%
CAGR of NMV per annual transacting seller, from Rs 4,27,429.78 in FY23, to Rs 5,83,697.39 in FY25
Meesho reported a net loss of about Rs 3,941.7 crore in FY25

InGovern Research Services Founder and MD Shriram Subramanian said, "Sellers of these companies (Amazon, Flipkart) address well-heeled customers who care about brands, quality, return logistics and are discerning. On the other hand, Meesho is a platform used by resellers who buy in bulk and sell to end-customers in small quantities. These sellers are buying goods from China or even locally in India, but sell it on Meesho across all geographies."

Amazon and Flipkart also provide a fulfilment basis for sellers where inventories are at the warehouses and orders are fulfilled quickly. The per order ticket size on Amazon or Flipkart will be much higher than the average order ticket size on Meesho, he added.

According to the Redseer report, the country's e-commerce market is currently sized at Rs 6 lakh crore in gross merchandise value (GMV), and the report projects it to reach Rs 15-18 lakh crore by fiscal 2030. It forecasts that the majority of new online shoppers will come from tier 2+ cities, which are projected to account for 51-52% of the country's e-commerce market by 2030.

Focus on AI/ML

The company said every interaction between its stakeholders on its platform generates rich data inputs, which are continuously fed into Artificial Intelligence/Machine Learning models. Of its total net proceeds, it also plans to use it to its existing and replacement hires for ML and AI & technology teams for AI and technology development undertaken by MTPL (Meesho Technologies Private Limited).

During the company's IPO press conference, Meesho Co-founder and Chairman Vidit Aatrey had said there were 234 million annual transacting users and 7,06,000 annual transacting sellers on its platform. The e-commerce platform has over 50,000 active content creators. In fiscal 2025, 198.77 million annual transacting users transacted on Meesho, of which 174.43 million were from outside the top 8 cities in India.

The company has reduced its Average Order Value (AOV) from Rs 336.71 in fiscal 2023, Rs 298.36 in fiscal 2024 to Rs 274.27 in fiscal 2025, and was Rs 269.36 in the three months period ended June 30, 2025.

Analysts who track e-commerce companies also pointed out the platform's low customer acquisition costs and asset-light operations. The company does not manufacture or sell private label products, own product inventory or logistics infrastructure, thus, these factors make it more capital-efficient compared to other e-commerce models that may depend on physical stores, warehousing, owned inventory and/or captive logistics.

Meesho's GMV grew to Rs 50,361 crore as of March 31, 2025, from Rs 34,504 crore in fiscal 2023.

GMV is the total value of placed orders by consumers on the marketplace. According to a recent report by brokerage firm CLSA, Meesho is expected to increase its share of the country's ecommerce market from 8.5% to 10% by FY30.

Though the company is gaining market share, will it be able to sustain the same? Hamidani said that sustainability will depend on maintaining quality, improving delivery experience, and managing seller standards as volumes grow. "If Meesho can evolve its brand trust without losing affordability, it has a strong chance of sustaining growth in India's next wave of digital consumers," he added.

India is world's largest rice producer: Minister

With output of 150.18 mn tonnes, India overtakes China in production

NEW DELHI, PTI

India has become the world's largest rice producer, beating China, with a total output of 150.18 million tonnes, Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said on Sunday, as he released 184 new varieties of 25 crops.

These new high-yielding seed varieties would boost crop production and enhance farmers' income, he said, while directing the ministry officials to ensure that these new varieties reach farmers quickly.

The minister unveiled 184 improved varieties of 25 field crops developed by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research at an event in the national capital, according to a statement.

Chouhan said the country has achieved great success in the development of high-yielding seeds.

Since the gazette notification process began in 1969, a total of 7,205 crop varieties have been notified, including rice, wheat, sorghum, maize, pulses, oilseeds, fiber crops, among others.

Chouhan informed that 3,236 high-yielding varieties have been approved by the Narendra Modi government, as compared to 3,969 varieties notified between 1969 and 2014.

The minister noted that India has transformed from being a food-deficient country to becoming a global food provider.

"India has surpassed China in rice production and has become the world's largest producer," Chouhan stated.

India's rice production has reached 150.18 million tonnes, compared to China's 145.28 million tonnes, he said, describing it as an unprecedented achievement.

India is now supplying rice in overseas markets, he said, adding that the country has abundant foodgrain stocks, thereby ensuring India's food security.

Elaborating on 184 advanced varieties released on Sunday, the minister said that farmers will be benefited as they will help in achieving higher yields and better quality of produce.

He emphasised the need to ensure that high-quality seeds reach every farmer's field. The minister also asked farm scientists to focus on increasing the production of pulses and oilseeds to make India self-sufficient.

Venezuela crisis unlikely to have any material impact on Indian economy

GYANENDRA KESHRI
NEW DELHI, DHNS

The crisis in Venezuela is unlikely to have any major impact on the Indian economy as India's trade with the Latin American country is low, analysts said.

"For India, the Venezuelan disturbance is unlikely to have any material economic or energy impact," Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) founder Ajay Srivastava said in a note.

Although India was a major buyer of Venezuelan crude in the 2000s and 2010s, and Indian firms such as ONGC Videsh held upstream stakes in the Orinoco belt, bilateral engagement has weakened sharply since 2019 due to US sanctions, which forced India to cut oil imports and scale back commercial activity to avoid secondary sanctions.

There has been a declining trend in India-Venezuela bilateral trade. India's total imports from Venezuela dipped to $364.5 million in 2024-25, which was nearly half of the previous year. Out of this, crude oil accounted for $255.3 million. India's exports to Venezuela were modest at $95.3 million, led by pharmaceuticals worth $41.4 million.

"Given the low trade volumes, existing sanction constraints, and the large geographical distance, the current developments in Venezuela are not expected to have any meaningful impact on India's economy or energy security," Srivastava said.

In a large-scale military operation, the US has captured Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores.

While the US action has led to a political crisis, it has not resulted in any major damage to Venezuela's core oil infrastructure.

Venezuela holds the world's largest proven petroleum reserves. It holds about 18% of the world's oil reserves, more than Saudi Arabia (around 16%), Russia (about 5-6%), or the US (around 4%). Venezuela alone has more crude oil reserves than the US and Russia combined.

SHIFT IN PATTERN

High input costs force realtors to shy away from affordable housing

MAHESH KULKARNI
BENGALURU, DHNS

Affordable housing is no longer affordable for real estate developers due to rising cost of inputs, land, and lack of government incentives. The various benefits and several interest stimulants that were offered to developers and consumers over the years since 2015 onwards, have expired in the last two years, thereby forcing realtors to shift focus from affordable housing.

The affordable housing segment has remained sluggish in 2025, in terms of both sales and new launches. The share of affordable housing in total sales has alarmingly dropped from an all-time high of 38% in 2019, to just about 18-19% across key cities in 2025, as real estate developers are shying away from launching new projects. In 2024, the share of affordable housing sales stood at 20% of the total sales of 4.60 lakh units in the top 7 cities. The affordable housing segment witnessed its highest level of 38% in 2019, when the total sales stood at 2.61 lakh units, according to data provided by ANAROCK Research.

"Amid restricted new supply addition in this budget category, unsold stock in the affordable segment has seen the highest decline among all budget categories across top cities. This itself indicates that there is high demand in this segment," Prashant Thakur, Executive Director & Head-Research & Advisory, ANAROCK Group, told *DH*.

However, he said, for various reasons developers are shying away from the segment with minimal new launches. Amid this minimal new supply, several buyers who are now looking to buy a home are coming forward and buying from the available stock, which was launched in previous years.

Mallanna Sasalu, CEO — South, Puravankara Limited, said the developers are not shying away from launching affordable housing projects. "A combination of factors are contributing to the slowdown in launching affordable projects. The industry is facing 55% rise in construction costs, 45% rise in labour costs, and another 6-8% rise in salaries of white-collar staff. Additionally, land prices have gone up steeply, which has made it difficult for launching affordable projects," he said.

There is a need to redefine the affordable housing segment, as it is no longer viable to sell houses at Rs 45 lakh price tag, he added.

As per ANAROCK Research, amid restricted new affordable housing supply in the last year, unsold stock in this segment shrank by 19% — from about 1.27 lakh units in Q3 2024-end, to 1.05 lakh units by Q3 2025-end.

Out of the total new supply of approx. 4.19 lakh units launched in 2025, the share of affordable housing was a mere 15%. Back in 2024, the share stood at 16% out of the total 4.13 lakh units launched.

The developers have slowed down the launch of new affordable or budget housing projects due to absence of incentives from the government. The various benefits and several interest stimulants that were offered to developers and consumers in this market over the years since 2015 onwards have expired in the last 1-2 years.

"It is imperative to revive and extend significant benefits, such as tax breaks, to encourage developers to construct more projects and make it possible for customers to acquire such homes", Thakur said.

Homes priced Rs 40-45 lakh have been previously considered affordable homes. However, the term "affordable housing" is somewhat ambiguous as it lacks a universal definition, he said.

The Confederation of Real Estate Developers' Associations of India (CREDAI) has requested the government to increase the price cap of affordable housing to Rs 90 lakh, from the current Rs 45 lakh, taking into consideration inflation and other cost factors.

CREDAI president-elect G Ram Reddy said the price cap of affordable housing has not changed for the past eight years. "We are looking to the Union Budget for urgent policy support," Reddy told reporters earlier this month.

In order to boost supply and incentivise developers to build more affordable housing, the CREDAI has urged the government to reintroduce the '100% Tax Holiday' benefit given previously to developers under Section 80-IBA in the Finance Act, 2016. This section provided for major tax relief for builders on the profits earned from developing and building affordable housing projects.

Rental housing a solution to ease urban pressure: Expert

Creating vertical housing complexes and rental communities in large cities are among the best solutions to address the housing requirements of a large population, according to Ashwin Mahesh, a Bengaluru-based urbanist.

"The cost of land in the city is extremely high, relative to the overall cost of a house. This can be compensated by focusing on vertical housing, but GBA/BDA has not shifted to this new mode. There is also no focus on creating 'rental' housing, which remains a disaggregated and informal market. Many homeowners believe rental laws are biased against owners," he said.

There is no policy of social housing to support economically-weaker sections. Their workforce participation is important throughout the city, but they cannot find affordable housing anywhere near their places of employment. "The government must reserve 30% of the land in all new layouts for rental-only housing communities. The real estate developers must construct houses for rent-only and not look for selling all the houses," Mahesh added.

Key suggestions

- Much more new housing is needed in fast-growing peri-urban areas, which are lying un-ploughed anyway. This would increase supply of housing and lower prices
- BDA needs to put an end to the old focus on 'site' development, and focus more on creating group housing.
- The Master Plan should include zoning for rental housing as well as low-income housing in each planning district
- The state government should either make adequate grants to GBA and BDA to construct adequate affordable housing or the permitting system needs to prioritise this sector

TOP PICKS

The data is sourced from Motilal Oswal Financial Services Limited

Max Financials
(ID: MFSL)
BUY
Upside +25%**
Last close ₹1,674
Target: ₹2,100*

Kotak Bank
(ID: KOTAKBANK)
BUY
Upside +14%**
Last close ₹2,190
Target: ₹2,500*

Zydus Wellness
(ID: ZYDUSWELL)
BUY
Upside +22%**
Last close ₹470
Target: ₹575*

Vmart Retail
(ID: VMART)
BUY
Upside +54%**
Last close ₹706
Target: ₹1,085*

Bharti Airtel
(ID: BHARTIARTL)
BUY
Upside +12%**
Last close ₹2,108
Target: ₹2,365*

* Target price has been calculated on the basis of fundamentals ** Upside refers to more value stock is expected to generate than its current price

Should you invest in silver in 2026?

Silver took centre stage in 2025 with 150% returns, outpacing gold and equities. The rally was driven by a sustained supply squeeze due to structural pressures like ongoing supply deficits, declining global inventories and steady industrial demand led by solar panels, electric vehicles, and data centres. Stockpiling by ETF investors amplified the rally furthur.

With these stupendous returns, investor interest in silver has spiked. Return predictions of 20% to 60% in 2026 are doing the rounds, driven by news of heightened industrial demand and constrained supply, which is being further fuelled by China's silver export restrictions and US declaring silver as a critical mineral. Despite these triggers, it is important for investors to tread cautiously.

This is because silver firstly does not generate cash flows and secondly this level of prices may be untenable for industrial use. Markets driven by scarcity rather than equilibrium can remain elevated longer than expected, but they are also prone to sharp corrections. As per data from FundsIndia, since 1971, silver has had upcycles lasting 8-10 years followed by downcycles of 7-10 years. The current upcycle phase has been for 6.4 years.

On a 10-year rolling return basis, in the last 50 years, silver has underperformed gold and equities 80% of the time. Silver is also more volatile than gold and equities. Given all this data, silver can at best be a tactical allocation which needs to be monitored carefully for timely exit.

MRIN AGARWAL
FINANCIAL EDUCATOR & FOUNDER, FINSAFE INDIA PVT LTD

What should investors do?

Investors who have missed the silver rally and now want to catchup should keep in mind that an asset with 150% recent performance will be extremely volatile in the near future. Deep corrections are possible given the overbought conditions and stretched valuations.

Investors need to assess their stance in case of a significant and prolonged fall. Can they hold until the performance recovers? For example, between 2002-2012, gold was on an upward trajectory. But from 2013-2019, gold was stagnant and only started recovering from 2020 onwards. Somebody who bought gold in 2012 had to wait for 10 years to get good returns.

Investors must be mindful that by the time an investment is hot, the easy returns are often gone. And when all and sundry start giving returns predictions, it is time to be cautious.

Investors should rely on research, not noise as research beats predictions anyday! Investors also need to pare their returns expectations to average returns from silver, which are 9-10% per annum on a long term basis.

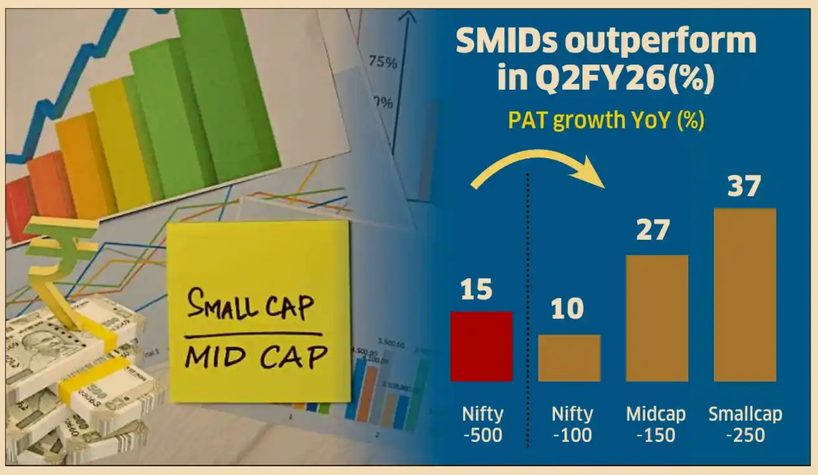
Individuals should evaluate where silver would fit in their portfolio. Can it be used for any financial goals? At best, it is a tactical allocation and certainly not a core allocation. Hence having an exit strategy in mind, with clear profit booking triggers would be prudent. Because, trends reward timing, not enthusiasm!

Happy Investing in 2026!

Why mid and smallcap funds are essential

The two indices have outperformed large cap index over the long term

RUSHABH DESAI



The most-important reason investors invest in equity mutual funds is to get superior returns. Keeping the nature of equity as an asset class in mind, all three types of equity mutual funds — large cap, midcap and smallcap funds — are expected to deliver superior returns from time to time in different market cycles, but of these, which ones have managed to deliver high alpha and superior returns and that too consistently? Let's find out.

On a 10-year daily rolling CAGR returns basis over the past 10 years, from April 1, 2015, to December 15, 2025, Nifty 100 TRI, Nifty Midcap 150 TRI and Nifty Smallcap TRI generated >= 15% CAGR returns, 14%, 60%, and 44%, respectively, of the entire period. In the same period on a 10-year CAGR returns basis, the midcap and smallcap indices outperformed the large cap index 98% and 69%, respectively, of the time.

Data at the index level proves that mid and smallcap indices have consistently delivered superior returns and have outperformed much higher number of times, compared to the large cap index, over the long term.

Now, many may be curious about the data of active funds within the large, mid and smallcap categories. Based on the same parameters at the category average level, on a 10-year daily rolling CAGR returns basis over the past 10 years, from April 1, 2015, to December 15, 2025, Large Cap Active Funds, Mid Cap Active Funds and Small Cap Active Funds generated >= 15% CAGR returns, 10%, 60%, and 64%, respectively, of the entire period. In the same period on a 10-year CAGR returns basis, active midcap and smallcap funds outperformed active large cap funds 100% and 97%, respectively, of the time.

Data at the active fund category average level too proves that active mid and smallcap funds have consistently delivered superior returns and have outperformed much higher number of times compared to active large cap funds over the long term.

A key point of observation is that active mid and smallcap funds have done far better in terms of delivering consistent superior returns and outperformance. The average outperformance of active mid and smallcap funds vs active large cap funds have been 3.9% and 4.4%, respectively.

This clearly answers the question "why mid and smallcap funds are a must to have in one's portfolio to achieve superior returns?" and clearly indicates that if investors want to generate alpha and superior returns, they will need to invest in the mid and smallcap categories.

Today, although the headline inflation in India is very low at just 0.71%, one should not forget that there are many areas like healthcare, education, travel, branded items, leisure services, etc., where annual inflation can range 12-15%. And the only way to beat this high inflation figure, particularly post taxation, is to have decent exposure towards mid and smallcaps. This is another important reason why one should look at investing in mid and smallcaps.

Investing in mid and smallcaps look lucrative, but there are two points that investors should bear in mind:

1. Large caps should not be completely ignored.

2. Investing in mid and smallcaps is not meant for the weak-hearted. All three market capitalisations (large, mid, and small) will perform in cycles. As per historical data, mid, and smallcaps have been extremely volatile and cyclical, especially in the short to medium term, compared to large caps, which have provided stability and thus, it is wise even for a highly-aggressive investor to have anywhere between 25% and 50% exposure towards large caps.

Now, many may ask will mid and smallcaps continue to deliver high alpha and superior returns in future? The answer is yes. Here is why – India is an emerging economy with a high GDP growth rate at 8.2% in Q3CY2025, aggregate Q2FY26 earnings growth of Nifty Midcap 150 and Nifty Smallcap 250 have been very strong at 27% and 37% YoY, respectively, and the universe of mid and smallcap companies is vast, giving fund managers ample opportunities to choose the right high growth stocks. Thus, with the current time and valuation correction in the equity markets, if the Indian economy and corporate earnings continue to generate high growth, there seems to be no reason to believe why mid and smallcaps would not deliver superior returns over the long term.

Investing in mid and smallcaps can be done via SIPs and/or lumpsum. The trick to generate higher returns and minimise volatility and cyclicality risks is to invest during price, time, and/or valuation correction pockets and by being patient for the long term (8-10 years).

(The writer is the founder of Rupee With Rushabh Investment Services)

MARKET OUTLOOK

Markets await Q3 updates, policy signals

Last week, markets ended on a strong note

SIDDHARTHA KHEMKA

The New Year has brought renewed optimism to markets, reflected in improved broader market participation and selective buying in mid-cap stocks. Expectations around upcoming Q3 results and supportive policy signals ahead of the Union Budget have further buoyed sentiment. We expect this positivity to continue and Indian equities to trade firm this week with focus on the ongoing pre-quarterly business updates, followed by start of the earnings season with TCS result announcement on January 12. On the global macro front, investors would watch out for Manufacturing and Services PMI data from the US and India and the US jobs data including Non-farm payrolls, Jolts Job Openings and Unemployment rate.

In an earnings preview on banks, we estimate system credit growth to remain at 12%+ YoY in FY26E and improve to ₹13% in FY27E. We expect large private banks to grow at 3-4% QoQ and mid-sized banks to grow at a faster pace. Further, we estimate PSU banks' PAT to grow by 2.6% YoY (0.7% QoQ) in 3QFY26E, dragged down by marginal decline in NIMs as well as modest treasury gains.

Last week, markets ended on a strong note with Nifty50 up 1.1%, rising to a record high of 26,340 on Friday amid upbeat corporate updates lifting expectations for Q3FY26 earnings and boosting investor sentiment. In the broader market, Nifty Midcap100 and Smallcap100 were up 1.7% and 0.8% respectively. Amongst sectors, Nifty Metal index emerged as the top gainer, recording weekly gains of 5.7% on the back of uptick in global commodity prices and supportive government policy announcements. Bank Nifty reached an all-time high of 60,152 on Friday, surpassing its previous peak of 60,114 recorded on December 1, 2025. Both Nifty PSU Bank and Nifty Private Bank indices touched fresh lifetime highs during Friday's session. Meanwhile, FMCG index was the top loser, falling by 3.9% as heavyweight ITC shares crashed on new excise duty rules on cigarettes.

As auto companies reported monthly volumes on January 1, 2026, the wholesale numbers remained strong, beating expectations for several OEMs, driven by positive consumer sentiment post GST cuts, a strong festive and wedding season, and a low base. PV wholesales grew 18.5% YoY, led by M&M and Maruti, while Tata PV and Hyundai underperformed peers. Two-wheelers posted robust 43% YoY growth, CVs grew a healthy 26% YoY, and tractor OEMs delivered ₹39% YoY growth. Retail demand remained equally healthy across segments. Thus, OEMs are likely to have ended 2025 with lean inventory, which we believe should help them sustain the volume momentum in 4QFY26 as well.

The government's recent notification proposed a sharp increase in cigarette taxes effective February 1, 2026, implying an overall tax hike of ₹50% (assuming NCCD continues), alongside implementation of the higher GST rate (40% vs 28% earlier). This would necessitate a steep price hike at the industry level to protect net realisations. Such a sharp increase is unprecedented after several years of tax stability, which had helped curb the illicit cigarette market. If there is no change in taxes, we expect that it will significantly impact the legal cigarette market, and the price arbitrage between legal and illegal brands will be huge. It can shift volume from legal to illicit brands and could lead to down trading within the legal brands.

Further, Indian government recently imposed trade-remedy measures, including anti-dumping duties, on select steel products to curb the influx of low-priced imports, largely from countries such as China and Vietnam. These measures, which include a safeguard duty of around 11–12% for up to three years on certain flat steel products, are aimed at protecting Indian manufacturers from unfair pricing and import surges. The move is broadly positive for Indian steel companies as it improves pricing power, supports margins, enhances capacity utilisation and provides earnings visibility for large players.

As we enter CY26, the broader market setup remains constructive, supported by improving liquidity, a stabilising earnings cycle and a policy environment conducive for private investment and credit expansion. Any resolution of the tariff stalemate with the US could provide an additional external catalyst.

Wishing all a Happy New Year!

(The writer is Head of Research, Wealth Management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Limited)

Mcap of top 7 most valued firms surges Rs 1.23 lakh crore

NEW DELHI, PTI: The combined market capitalisation of seven of the top-10 most-valued firms surged Rs 1,23,724.19 crore last week, in line with an optimistic trend in equities, with Reliance Industries stealing the limelight with the biggest jump in its valuation.

Last week, the BSE benchmark jumped 720.56 points, or 0.84%.

From the top-10 pack, Reliance Industries, HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel, ICICI Bank, State Bank of India, Larsen & Toubro and Hindustan Unilever were the gainers, while Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), Infosys, and Bajaj Finance faced erosion from their valuation.

The market valuation of Reliance Industries jumped Rs 45,266.12 crore to Rs 21,54,978.60 crore.

State Bank of India added Rs 30,414.89 crore, taking its valuation to Rs 9,22,461.77 crore.

Larsen & Toubro's valuation surged Rs 16,204.34 crore to Rs 5,72,640.56 crore and that of Hindustan Unilever climbed Rs 14,626.21 crore to Rs 5,51,637.04 crore.

The market capitalisation (mcap) of HDFC Bank edged higher by Rs 13,538.43 crore to Rs 15,40,303.87 crore and that of ICICI Bank advanced Rs 3,103.99 crore to Rs 9,68,773.14 crore.

The mcap of Bharti Airtel went up Rs 570.21 crore to Rs 12,01,262.53 crore.

However, the market valuation of TCS eroded Rs 10,745.72 crore to Rs 11,75,914.62 crore.

The mcap of Infosys declined Rs 6,183.25 crore to Rs 6,81,635.59 crore and that of Bajaj Finance dropped Rs 5,693.58 crore to Rs 6,16,430.43 crore.

Reliance Industries retained the title of the most valued firm followed by HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel, TCS, ICICI Bank, State Bank of India, Infosys, Bajaj Finance, Larsen & Toubro, and Hindustan Unilever.

FPIs pull out Rs 7,608 crore from equities in just 2 days of January

NEW DELHI, PTI: Foreign portfolio investors have started 2026 on a cautious note, extending their selling streak from last year by withdrawing Rs 7,608 crore ($846 million) from Indian equities in the first two trading sessions of January.

The withdrawal of funds followed the largest outflow of Rs 1.66 lakh crore ($18.9 billion) recorded in 2025, triggered by volatile currency movements, global trade tensions and concerns over potential US tariffs, and stretched market valuations.

This sustained selling pressure by foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) has significantly contributed to the nearly 5% depreciation of the rupee against the dollar during 2025.

However, market experts believe the tide could turn in 2026.

VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Investments, said the year is likely to witness a shift in FPI strategy, as improving domestic fundamentals may start attracting net foreign inflows.

UPCOMING LAUNCHES

Most anticipated feature-rich smartphones of 2026

ROHIT KVN
BENGALURU, DHNS

Global smartphone makers packed 2025 with feature-rich handsets across all price segments. Ultra-slim devices like the Galaxy Z Fold7 and iPhone Air competed alongside the OnePlus 15R's massive battery, the Nothing Phone (3a) Pro's stylish design, and the well-rounded budget Redmi 15.

In 2026, manufacturers are expected to push boundaries further with more visually striking designs, more powerful processors optimized for AI features, and even larger batteries.

Samsung Galaxy S26 Ultra

The Galaxy S25 Ultra stood out in the premium segment last year, and Samsung appears poised to build on that success with substantial upgrades across the S26 Ultra lineup.

Rumors suggest an enhanced display panel with a higher refresh rate (144Hz or 165Hz), top-notch anti-reflective coating, and improved photography hardware featuring a new 200MP camera. The device will also include Samsung's signature in-built S Pen stylus—a feature no competitor can match.

Samsung will reportedly offer the device with either Qualcomm's latest Snapdragon 8 Elite Gen 5 or its own Exynos 2600, depending on the market. The Exynos chip, built on a 2nm fabrication process, promises significant gains in both performance and power efficiency.

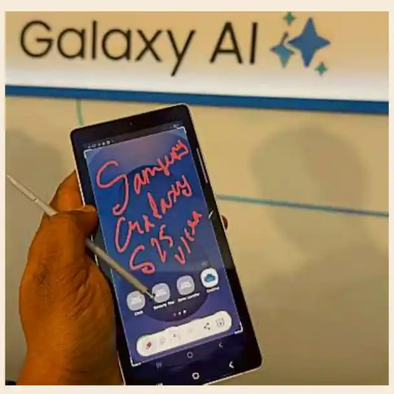
Additionally, it is expected to support faster 60W charging and carry a price tag above Rs 1.2 lakh.

Beyond the S26 Ultra, Samsung is expected to launch a standard Galaxy S26 and an ultra-slim S26 Edge. Later in the year, the Galaxy Z Fold8 and Flip8 series should arrive with incremental upgrades and minor design tweaks.

Redmi Note 15

Xiaomi is set to unveil the mid-range Redmi Note 15 on January 6 in India.

The phone is expected to sport a slim profile with a sturdy build, featuring a 6.77-inch full HD+ AMOLED screen with a 120Hz refresh rate and peak brightness of 3,200 nits.



Under the hood, it will house a Qualcomm Snapdragon 6 Gen 3 chipset paired with a 5,520mAh battery. The camera will see an upgrade with a 108MP main camera.

The phone is likely to be priced between Rs 20,000 and Rs 25,000.

Apple iPhone Fold

For nearly five years, reports have circulated about Apple developing a foldable iPhone with a flexible display, but it has yet to materialise.

However, as the Cupertino-based tech giant prepares to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the original iPhone, a 2026 launch for its foldable handset seems increasingly likely.

Leaked CAD files suggest the device—rumored to be called the iPhone Fold—will feature a book-style bendable design with a sturdy titanium hinge and a flexible OLED panel with no noticeable crease. It's expected to have a 5.3-inch cover display that expands to 7.6 inches when unfolded.

The device could be one of the thinnest on the market at just 4.9mm when unfolded and roughly 9.8mm when folded. Due to design constraints, Apple may drop Face ID in favour of bringing back Touch ID.

Inside, the iPhone Fold is expected to house a 2nm-class Apple A20 Pro chipset, promising all-day battery life, significant performance improvements, and faster response times for on-device AI applications compared to the A19 Pro found in the iPhone 17 Pro models.

The price will likely exceed Rs 1.75 lakh.

Apple will also introduce the iPhone 18 Pro and 18 Pro Max in September 2026. However, the launch of the second-generation iPhone Air and standard iPhone 18 has reportedly been pushed to the first quarter of 2027.

Google Pixel 11

Google is expected to unveil the Pixel 11 by end of the third quarter. The device should retain the minimalist design elements of the Pixel 10, including the distinctive capsule-shaped camera bar on the back.

Inside, it's expected to feature the Tensor G6, built using a cutting-edge 2nm semiconductor manufacturing process. The chip promises a significant performance boost for running AI applications more smoothly than its predecessor.

The device will be capable of editing and generating photorealistic synthetic images and videos from simple text prompts—capabilities that should far exceed those of current premium phones.

Additionally, improved power efficiency is expected to deliver longer battery life. The Pixel 11 should be priced around Rs 80,000, while the 11 Pro will cost more than Rs 1 lakh.

OnePlus 16

The OnePlus 15 delivered exceptional performance and long battery life, but its photography hardware remained a weak point.

Recent reports indicate the OnePlus 16 will receive a significant camera upgrade, possibly featuring a 200MP main sensor.

Since the OnePlus 15 launched just two months ago, its successor likely won't debut until the fourth quarter of 2026, probably equipped with the Qualcomm Snapdragon 8 Elite Gen 6.

If mobile silicon and memory chip prices continue rising, expect the OnePlus 16's starting price to reach Rs 75,000 or higher.

Looking Ahead

Other notable smartphones expected to launch in 2026 include the Vivo X500, Oppo Find X10, and iQOO 16, all with incremental upgrades over their predecessors.

'LIBERTY': Regime change offers hope for long-awaited reunion with loved ones

Venezuelans abroad celebrate Maduro ouster

DORAL (US), AP

Revellers chanted "liberty" and draped Venezuelan flags over their shoulders in South Florida on Saturday to celebrate the US military operation to capture Nicolás Maduro and remove him from the country — a stunning outcome they had longed for but left them wondering what comes next in their troubled homeland.

For some Venezuelan natives, the military action — culminating months of stepped-up US pressure — brought their dreams of reuniting with loved ones closer to reality after years of heartbreaking separations.

People gathered for a rally in Doral — the Miami suburb where President Donald Trump has a golf resort and where roughly half the population is of Venezuelan descent — as word spread that Venezuela's now-deposed president had been captured and flown out of the country.

Outside El Arepazo restaurant, a hub of the Venezuelan culture of Doral, one man held a piece of cardboard with "Libertad" scrawled with a black marker. It was a sentiment expressed by other native Venezuelans hoping for a new beginning for their home country as they chanted "Liberty! Liberty! Liberty!"

"We're like everybody — it's a combination of feelings, of course," said Alejandra Arrieta, who came to the US in 1997. "There's fears. There's excitement. There's so many years that we've been waiting for this. Something had to happen in Venezuela. We all need the freedom."

Some Venezuelan exiles feel hopeful after US actions-For David Nuñez, the regime change offered hope for a long-awaited reunion with loved ones.

Nuñez said he fled to the United States six years ago after being persecuted in Venezuela for his political activism and has not seen his daughters — ages 8 and 17 — since then.

"The most important thing is that we're going to be able to be with our families soon," Nuñez said. "At least for me, I haven't seen my daughters in six years so I have a lot of mixed feelings. I've cried a lot. I'm really happy because I know that I'm going to be able to return to Venezuela very soon."

Trump insisted on Saturday that the US government would run the country at least temporarily and was already doing so. The action marked the culmination of an escalating Trump administration pressure campaign on the oil-rich South American nation as well as weeks of planning that tracked Maduro's behavioral habits.

Venezuelans and others celebrate in Barcelona, Spain, following US strikes on Venezuela in which President Nicolas Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, were captured on Sunday. REUTERS

US action sets dangerous precedent, says UN chief

UNITED NATIONS, PTI: UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has voiced his concern over the escalation between the US and Venezuela culminating in the capture of the country's President Nicolás Maduro, saying the developments constitute a "dangerous precedent".

The secretary general is "deeply alarmed by the recent escalation in Venezuela, culminating with today's United States military action in the country, which has potential worrying implications for the region", a statement issued by his spokesperson said on Saturday.

Guterres said that independently of the situation in Venezuela, "these developments constitute a dangerous precedent" and said he is "deeply concerned that the rules of international law have not been respected".

EMMANUEL MACRON
President of France

"The transition to come must be peaceful, democratic, and respectful of the will of the Venezuelan people. We hope that President Edmundo Gonzalez Urrutia, elected in 2024, will be able to ensure this transition as quickly as possible.

RAJA KRISHNAMOORTHI
US Congressman

"By acting without congressional authorisation and publicly asserting US control over another sovereign nation, President Trump is abusing presidential power and undermining the Constitution's separation of powers

RO KHANNA
US Congressman

"What will we say now if (Chinese President) Xi Jinping wants to capture (President Lai Ching-te) Lai of Taiwan or (Russian President Vladimir) Putin tries to capture (President) Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Ukraine?

US strike to embolden China's territorial claims, Taiwan attack unlikely: Analysts

SHANGHAI/BEIJING, REUTERS

The US attack on Venezuela will embolden China to strengthen its territorial claims over areas such as Taiwan and parts of the South China Sea but will not hasten any potential invasion of Taiwan, analysts said.

Chinese President Xi Jinping's considerations about Taiwan and his timeline are separate from the situation in Latin America, influenced more by China's domestic situation than by US actions, they said.

Still, analysts said, President Donald Trump's audacious attack on Saturday, capturing Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro, hands China an unexpected opportunity that Beijing will likely use in the near term to amplify criticism of Washington and bolster its own standing on the international stage.

Further out, Beijing could leverage Trump's move to defend its stance against the US on territorial issues including Taiwan, Tibet and islands in the East and South China seas.

"Washington's consistent, long-standing arguments are always that the Chinese actions are violating international law but they are now damaging that," said William Yang, an analyst at International Crisis Group, a Brussels-based NGO.

"It's really creating a lot of openings and cheap ammunition for the Chinese to push back against the US in the future."

China claims democratically governed Taiwan as its own province - an assertion the island's government rejects - and claims almost all of the South China Sea, a position that puts it at odds with several Southeast Asian nations that also claim parts of the vital trade route.

China's foreign ministry and Taiwan Affairs Office, and Taiwan's presidential office did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Beijing condemned Trump's strike on Venezuela, saying it violated international law and threatened peace and security in Latin America. It has demanded the US release Maduro and his wife, who are being detained in New York awaiting trial.

Resume normal activities: Army to people

The head of Venezuela's military on Sunday urged the country's population to resume their normal activities, after US forces bombed the country and seized its leader Nicolas Maduro.

"I call on the people of Venezuela to resume their activities of all kinds, economic, work and education, in the coming days," Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino Lopez said in a televised address.

UK bombs Syria IS arms bunker in joint strike with France

LONDON, PTI: British and French air force jets have conducted intelligence-led strikes to destroy an arms bunker occupied by the Islamic State (IS) terrorist group in Syria, the UK's Ministry of Defence (MoD) said on Sunday.

Royal Air Force (RAF) Typhoon FGR4s, supported by a Voyager refuelling tanker, joined French aircraft in the joint strike on the underground facility on Saturday evening.

According to the Ministry of Defence, guided bombs were used to target a number of access tunnels down to a bunker linked with IS – officially referred to as Daesh.

"This action shows our UK leadership, and determination to stand shoulder to shoulder with our allies, to stamp out any resurgence of Daesh and their dangerous and violent ideologies in the Middle East," said John Healey, UK Defence Secretary.

Trump posts immigrant welfare list; India missing

NEW YORK/WASHINGTON, PTI

US President Donald Trump on Sunday posted a list of several countries, including Pakistan, Bhutan, China, Bangladesh and Nepal, to highlight rates of welfare and assistance received by immigrants from those countries in the US, a compilation that does not include India.

The 'Immigrant Welfare Recipient Rates by Country of Origin' list includes about 120 nations and territories around the world, whose immigrants in the US receive assistance.

The chart, posted by Trump on Truth Social, highlights the immigrants' country of birth and the percentage of immigrant households receiving assistance.

The list includes Bangladesh, with 54.8% of immigrant households from that country receiving assistance, Pakistan (40.2%), Nepal (34.8%), China (32.9%), and Israel/Palestine (25.9%), Ukraine 42.7% and Asia (not elsewhere classified/not specified) 38.8%.

Data has shown that Indian-Americans have among the highest median household incomes among major ethnic groups in the US.

According to the Pew Research Centre, Indian Americans are the second-largest Asian-origin population living in the US, accounting for approximately 21% of the country's Asian population.

The median annual income of Indian-headed households was USD 151,200 in 2023.

Among Asian-headed households overall, it was USD 105,600. Households with an Indian immigrant household head had a higher median annual income than those with a US-born Indian household head (USD 156,000 vs. USD 120,200).

The median annual personal earnings of Indian Americans ages 16 and older were USD 85,300 in 2023, higher than among Asians overall (USD 52,400), according to data.

Three held for Hindu bizman's death in Bangladesh

'Radical groups trying to intimidate minority faiths'

DHAKA, PTI

Three persons were arrested on Sunday in the case of hacking and burning to death a Hindu businessman in Shariatpur district of Bangladesh, local media reports said.

Khokon Chandra Das, 50, was assaulted near Keurbhanga Bazar in Damudya in Shariatpur district, about 100 kilometres south of Dhaka, on Wednesday night. He died on Saturday. Prothom Alo newspaper said a team of Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) arrested the three accused on Sunday morning from Kishoreganj, about 100 kilometres northeast of Dhaka.

The arrested were identified as Damudyar Sohag Khan, 27, Rabbi Molya, 21, and Palash Sardar, 25.

RAB Madaripur Camp Company Commander Superintendent of Police Mir Monir Hossain told Prothom Alo that the accused were being brought to Madaripur camp from Kishoreganj.

Madaripur is about 20-odd kilometres away from Shariatpur.

BNP praises PM Modi

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) appreciated Prime Minister Narendra Modi's condolence message on former prime minister Khaleda Zia's demise while recalling her contribution to India-Bangladesh ties, reports PTI.
The three-time Bangladesh prime minister and BNP patriarch died on December 30 following a prolonged illness.

Das, who ran a medicine shop and mobile banking business, was travelling in an autorickshaw when the attackers intercepted the vehicle and allegedly beat him up, hacked him with sharp weapons and then poured petrol on his head before setting him on fire, media reports had said on Thursday.

Doctors in Dhaka said Das suffered multiple injuries across his body, including a serious wound to his abdomen, along with burn injuries on his face, head and hands.

Shariatpur Superintendent of Police Rawnak Jahan said the victim had named the accused before his death, news portal BDNews24 said on Sunday.

Das' was the fifth death of a person from Hindu community since December and radical groups in Bangladesh are visibly trying to intimidate the minority faiths, Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council spokesman Kajol Debnath said after his death on Saturday.

Communal tension flares in Nepal towns near India border

KATHMANDU, PTI: Protests over a video with alleged religious content on social media turned violent as tension flared across two places in southern Nepal, near the Indian border, on Sunday.

Police lobbed tear gas shells to contain the situation in Birgunj town of Parsa district, bordering Raxaul in India, where demonstrations were held to protest vandalisation of a mosque in Dhanusha district on Saturday.

Three people were detained for allegedly posting the TikTok video and for their involvement in the vandalism, Dhanusha police said.

The vandalising of the mosque by a group of people in Sakhuwa Maran area of Kamala Municipality of Dhanusha district was a result of anti-Hindu content spread through social media allegedly by two Muslim youths, police said.

Protesting the incidents in Dhanusha district, a group of Muslims demonstrated in Birjung by burning tires on Sunday morning.

"As their demonstration turned violent with pelting stones on police personnel and vandalising the local police station, almost half a dozen tear gas shells were lobbed to bring the situation under control," police added.

Bhola Dahal, Chief District Officer, Parsa, through a public appeal later on Sunday evening, urged people not to engage in any activities that disrupt social harmony.

New clashes in Iran as protests enter second week

PARIS, AFP

New deadly clashes between protesters and security forces erupted in Iran over the weekend, rights groups and local media said Sunday, as demonstrations first sparked by anger over the rising cost of living entered a second week.

At least 12 people, including members of the security forces have been killed since the protests kicked off with a shopkeeper's strike in Tehran on December 28, according to a toll based on official reports.

Overnight, protests featuring slogans criticising the Islamic republic's clerical authorities were reported in Tehran, Shiraz in the south, and in areas of western Iran where the movement has been concentrated, according to the US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA) monitor.

Protesters wave pre-1979 Islamic Revolution flags of Iran as they gather for a demonstration against the Iranian regime's crackdown on protests in central Paris, on Sunday. AFP

The demonstrations are the most significant in Iran since a 2022-2023 movement sparked by the death in custody of Mahsa Amini, who had been arrested for allegedly violating Iran's strict dress code for women.

The latest protests have been concentrated in parts of the west with large populations of the Kurdish and Lor minorities, and have yet to reach the scale of the 2022-2023 movement, let alone the mass street demonstrations that followed disputed 2009 presidential elections.

But they do present a new challenge for supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei -- 86, and in power since 1989 -- coming on the heels of a 12-day war with Israel in June that saw nuclear infrastructure damaged and key members of the security elite killed.

The protests have taken place in 23 out of 31 provinces and affected, to varying degrees, at least 40 different cities, most of them small and medium-sized, according to an AFP tally based on official announcements and media reports.

The Norway-based Hengaw rights group said that Revolutionary Guards opened fire on protesters in the Malekshahi county of the western Ilam province on Saturday, killing four members of Iran's Kurdish minority.

WORLD AT A GLANCE

A participant carves ice for the ice sculpture contest during the annual Ice and Snow Festival in Harbin, Heilongjiang Province, China, on Sunday. REUTERS

Photo of US-flagged Greenland by Trump aide's wife irks Denmark

▸ Denmark on Sunday made its displeasure known after the wife of President Donald Trump's most influential aide posted a social media picture of Greenland painted in the colours of the US flag, reports AFP from Copenhagen.

Katie Miller -- wife of Trump's deputy chief of staff Stephen Miller -- put the contentiously altered image of the Danish autonomous territory on her X feed late Saturday, after the US military operation against Venezuela.

Her post had a single word above it: "SOON".

Denmark's ambassador to the US, Jesper Moeller Soerensen, reacted on Sunday with his own post saying "we expect full respect for the territorial integrity" of Denmark, above a link to Katie Miller's image.

The US president has repeatedly made clear that he wants Greenland to become an annexed part of the United States.

Moves edging towards that goal by his government -- including his appointment of an envoy to the Danish territory -- have drawn the ire of both Copenhagen and the European Union.

Stephen Miller is widely seen as the architect of much of Trump's policies, guiding the president on his hardline immigration policies and domestic agenda.

22 Indian sailors held in Nigeria

▸ Nigeria's drug enforcement agency Sunday said it had arrested 22 Indian crew members of a merchant ship after 31.5 kilogrammes of cocaine was found on the vessel at Lagos's main port, reports AFP from Lagos.

The seizure was made on January 2 aboard MV Aruna Hulya which "originated from Marshall Islands," Femi Babafemi, spokesman for the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), said. Nigeria has long been considered a trafficking and production hub for drugs bound for Europe and other African countries.

The agency said in November that it arrested 20 Filipino sailors caught ferrying at least 20 kilogrammes of cocaine from Brazil to the same port.

Earlier that month, NDLEA said it was working with US and British anti-drug agencies to probe cartel behind importation of 1,000 kilograms of cocaine discovered in a container at a Lagos port.

A Boeing 777-369 (ER) Kuwait Airways aircraft headed to Mumbai is silhouetted against a Waning Gibbous moon above Kuwait City on Sunday. AFP

Flights grounded in Greece

▸ Flights across Greece were grounded on Sunday after a collapse of radio frequencies crippled air traffic communication, stranding thousands of travellers and bringing airport operations to a halt, reports Reuters.

There was little clarity on what caused the disruption, which began early Sunday and quickly escalated. Some overflights across Greek and regional airspace were still being serviced, but restrictions were imposed on airport operations for safety reasons, Greece's civil aviation authority said.

Dozens of flights were disrupted. "For some reason all frequencies were suddenly lost .. We could not communicate with aircraft in the sky," Panagiotis Psarros, chair of the Association of Greek Air Traffic Controllers, told state broadcaster ERT.

He said the problem seemed to be a collapse of central radio frequency systems at the Athens and Macedonia area control systems, the largest air control facility in the country based in Athens.

Miley Cyrus poses with the Outstanding Artistic Achievement Award for her song 'Dream As One' from 'Avatar: Fire and Ash' during the 37th Annual Palm Springs International Film Festival in Palm Springs, California. REUTERS

Rings missing, bouts delayed in Boxing Nationals

GREATER NOIDA, PTI: The country's boxers were left anxiously waiting for hours as chaos marred the opening day of the senior boxing National Championships, which was delayed by more than four hours due to "logistical" issues here on Sunday.

The tournament, meant to mark a landmark moment with the men's and women's national championships being staged together for the first time, was scheduled to begin at 2 pm at the Gautam Buddh University.

Instead, confusion and prolonged waiting defined the day. The competition rings themselves were not ready. Three rings were scheduled to be in place, but only one was assembled by around 4pm and even that had to be reassembled due to a technical issue.

The first of the 80 bouts -- 38 women's and 42 men's -- finally got underway at 6:30 pm with the men's competition.

While, the women pugilists were left waiting even longer as there was still no word till 8pm as to when their bouts would begin and the third ring was yet to be assembled.

"The delay was because of certain logistical issues," Boxing Federation of India secretary general Pramod Kumar told PTI.

King Ke wins main event

MUMBAI RESULTS

King Ke, from the stables of Pesi Shroff and ridden by Siddharth, won the Maharastra, Gujarat & Goa Trophy, the feature event of the races on Sunday.

1. White Metal Trophy (Div II) - 1200M: Manor House (Solomon Sopher) SG Prasad 1; Spot Light (G Vivek) 2; Mila (A Omkar) 3; Red Merlot (Avinash Paswan) 4; Not Run: Applause. Wb: 5, 1/2, 1-3/4L. T: 1:11.06. TB: Aman Altaf Hussain. Fav: Spot Light.

2. Aslam Khader Salver - 2000M: Ekatarina (Equus Racing) Neeraj Rawal 1; Allez Etoile (Mustakim Alam) 2; Little John (Akshay Kumar) 3; Giant Gold (Aditya Waydande) 4; Wb: 2-1/2, 1-1/4, 3/4l. T: 2:04.52. TB: Imtiaz Sait. Fav: Dedication.

3. Behram A Engineer Salver - 1400M: Axlord (Jaydev Mody) TS Jodha 1; Money Fair (Aditya Waydande) 2; All For Love (Yash Narredu) 3; Star Impact (G Vivek) 4; Wb: Lnk, 1, 2-3/4L. T: 1:24.58. TB: Behram Cama. Fav: Tyrannus.

4. Kheem Singh Salver - 1200M: Margaretta (Mehermosh Deboo) G Vivek 1; Mystica (Sandesh) 2; Paloma (Yash Narredu) 3; Victory Flair (Trevor Patel) 4; Wb: 2-3/4, 1-1/4, 5L. T: 1:11.02. TB: Pesi Shroff. Fav: Margaretta.

5. Maharastra, Gujrarat & Goa Trophy - 2000M: King Ke (Vijay B Shirke) Siddharth 1; Kimiko (CS Jodha) 2; Alpine Star (Mustakim Alam) 3; Wb: 5-1/4, 4L. T: 2:04.85. TB: Pesi Shroff. Fav: King Ke.

6. White Metal Trophy (Div I) - 1200M: Ariyana Star (Dinsha P Shroff) Trevor Patel 1; Marcus (Mustakim Alam) 2; Escape Velocity (Ramswarup 3; Alexandria (Nazil) 4. Wb: Nk, 3/4L, Lnk. T: 1:11.26. TB: Aman Altaf Hussain. Fav: Chelsea.

7. FK Vakil Salver - 1000M: Enforcer (Mark Saldanha) Yash Narredu 1; House Of Lords (Avinash Paswan) 2; Akitania (David Allan) 3; Viennoise (A Omkar) 4. Not run: Zephyr & Illusionist Wb: 3-1/4, 1/2L, Lnk. T: 0:58.50. TB: Mallesh Narredu. Fav: Enforcer.

8. RR Komandur Plate - 1200M: Agatha (Mrs Bakhtawar Chenoy) A Omkar 1; Ekla Cholo (Umesh) 2; Jetfire (P Dhebe) 3; Whisper (Yash Narredu) 4. Wb: 1, 2-1/2L, Hd. T: 1:11.79. TB: Bezan Chenoy. Fav: Whisper.

Bengaluru dividends:
I race: Rs 32w; 14, 10, 14p; Fc: Rs 54; Q: Rs 29; Shp: Rs 30; Thp: Rs 30: Tri: Rs 99 & 64; Ex: Rs 347 & 211.
II race: Rs 106w; 19, 30, 14p; Fc: Rs 2,618; Q: Rs 1,035; Shp: Rs 128; .Thp: Rs 38; Tri: Rs 6,758 & 2,482; Ex: Rs 71,063 (c/o).
III race: Rs 47w; 17, 16, 13p; Fc: Rs 186; Q: Rs 143; Shp: Rs 39; Thp: Rs 50; Tri: Rs 523 & 127; Ex: Rs 2,358 & 1,139.
IV race: Rs 16w; 10, 10, 21p: Fc: Rs 23; Q: Rs 19; Shp: Rs 26; Thp: Rs 37; Tri: Rs 174 & 147; Ex: Rs 186 & 34.
V race: Rs 11w; Fc: Rs 13; Shp: Rs 13;
VI race: Rs 37w; 17, 54, 16p; Fc: Rs 900; Q: Rs 872; Shp: Rs 156; Thp: Rs 58; Tri: Rs 6,322 & 1,524; Ex: Rs 53,847 (c/o) & 11,538.
VII race: Rs 20w; 10, 24, 15p; Fc: Rs 165; Q: Rs 157; Shp: Rs 72; Thp: Rs 34; Tri: Rs 346 & 109; Ex: Rs 2,912 & 1,381.
VIII race: Rs 32w; 14, 16, 21p; Fc: Rs 10; Q: Rs 11; Shp: Rs 40; Thp: Rs˙45; Tri: Rs 931 & 307; Ex: Rs 1,596 & 430.
Jackpot: Rs 836 (911). **Runner-up:** Rs 77 (4261) **I treble:** Rs 1,116 (88).
II treble: Rs 677 (196).

The Panther for feature

DELHI SELECTIONS

S Nawab-trained The Panther, to be ridden by Nazil, is fancied to win the upper division of the Ponza Plate, the feature event of the races to be run over a distance of seven furlongs at the races on Monday.

The first race starts at 2:00 pm.

1. Sunray Plate - 1400M: Real Boss 1, Rhapsody In Green 2, Jet Space 3.
2. Ponza Plate (Div I) - 1400M: The Panther 1, Rinku Romeo 2, Ronaldo 3.
3. Ponza Plate (Div II) - 1400M: Attenborough 1, Mr Christopher 2, Treasure 3.
4. Bee's Prospector Plate - 1200M: Ashwa Changez 1, Insta Millionaire 2, Poly Czar 3.
5. Razeen Plate - 1000M: Tomorrows Dreams 1, Lemon Pie 2, Time To Win 3.
6. China Visit Plate - 1000M: Stylish Dancer 1, Chieftain 2, Lady Danger 3.
Day's best: Stylish Dancer. **Jackpot:** 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6. **Treble:** 4, 5 & 6.

TENNIS BENGALURU OPEN

Indians have their task cut out

Nagal leads home hope; Martinez starts favourite

India's Sumit Nagal will be hoping to kickstart the new season with a bang at the Bengaluru Open that gets underway on Monday at the SM Krishna Tennis Stadium. DH FILE PHOTO

LIVE 11:00 AM, FANCODE

ADITYA K HALDER
BENGALURU, DHNS

International events have largely kept their distance from Garden City ever since the heartbreaking RCB trophy celebration stampede. Since then, not a single international cricket match has unfolded in front of a packed crowd, or a crowd for that matter, with even Virat Kohli's recent masterful hundred coming behind closed doors. For a city like Bengaluru that silence has been loud and a bit strange too.

Yet, amid all this hush, tennis has held its ground. While other sports paused and waited, the Karnataka State Lawn Tennis Association (KSLTA) pushed on as they are ready to host its third international event in just two months.

After pulling off an entertaining Billie Jean King Cup and the World Tennis League, the Bengaluru Open now returns for a special 10th edition. Slotted as an upgraded ATP 125 Challenger event, it kicks off the 2026 season, right before India's top players pack their bags for a gruelling 30-35 weeks on tour, chasing ranking points across continents, airports and different time zones.

"There's a reason it has reached its 10th edition," said Saketh Myneni while speaking to the media. "I have got to thank KSLTA for providing a tournament like this at the beginning of the year. It sets the tone for the rest of the year and nothing like doing it in front of the home fans." For India's leading singles player Sumit Nagal, the Bengaluru Open comes at a crucial time. After a rough 2025 that saw him slide over 150 places to world No. 275, the 28-year-old Haryana man has been looking for a reset and Bengaluru offered exactly that. Following the WTL, Nagal spent the last two weeks training in a city he openly calls his second home.

"Bangalore means a lot to me as I won my first Challenger title here in 2017," said Nagal. "I have always stated this is one of the best challenger tournaments in the world and the relationship I have with Sunil sir (Sunil Yajaman, KSLTA official), feels like I am coming back home. A lot of (crowd) support for us here and feels great whenever the crowd gets behind you, something you don't often get for the rest of the tour."

If Bengaluru feels like a second home for some, for Prajwal Dev it's simply his backyard. The Mysuru-born wildcard entrant comes in riding confidence after his ITF World Tennis Tour M15 success in Bhubaneswar last month. Ranked world No. 629, Prajwal is keeping things simple as he refuses to let the occasion weigh him down too much.

History, however, hasn't been too kind to Indian players here as none managed to get past the first round last year.

The tournament hasn't seen an Indian singles champion since 2018 when Prajnesh Gunneswaran lifted the title by defeating Saketh in an all-Indian final. The story could be no different this season too with world No. 95 Spaniard Pedro Martinez entering the tournament as the only player in double digits of ATP ranking spread.

The 2021 French Open semifinalist, however, hasn't been in the best of form in the hard-court season of 2025 with multiple early exits, including Cincinnati Masters and US Open, since his third-round exit at the hands of Jannik Sinner at Wimbledon.

France's Harold Mayot (ATP No. 163) may sense his opportunity as the second-highest-ranked entrant and may have to take on Nagal as early as the second round with the 23-year-old French winning their last and only face-off in straight sets last year.

But Dakshineshwar Suresh believes this time could be different for the Indians, given their familiarity with the bouncy SM Krishna Tennis Stadium courts as he confidently throws down a challenge.

"Most of us got a favourable draw and with Sumit already been training here while for Prajwal it's home court. I played here last month as well so all of us are accustomed to the conditions, let's see which of one of us come at the top," said Suresh.

Win or lose, the Bengaluru Open feels less about results this week and more about a city slowly finding its sporting voice again, one rally at a time.

Rawat lone Indian to win

Siddharth Rawat was the only Indian who managed to win the opening round of the qualifiers of Bengaluru Open on Sunday with as many as six Indians losing on the day, reports DHNS.

Results: Qualifiying round 1 (only Indians): Sidharth Rawat bt Nitin Kumar Sinha 6-3, 7-5; Aziz Ouakaa (Tun) bt Aditya Vishal Balsekar 6-4, 7-6 (3); Niels Visker (NED) bt Manish Sureshkumar 6-3, 6-3; Arthur Reymond (FRA) bt Ramkumar Ramanathan 7-5, 7-6 (3); Dominik Palan (CZE) bt Dev Javia 3-6, 7-5, 7-6 (5); Eero Vasa (FIN) bt Adil Kalyanpur 3-6, 6-3, 6-0.

AIFF executive committee meeting today

ADITYA K HALDER
BENGALURU, DHNS

The All Indian Football Federation's (AIFF) executive committee are all set to meet on Monday to discuss the commencement dates and the format for the much-delayed Indian Super League season as the Supreme Court hearing nears.

The committee, led by the federation's president Kalyan Chaubey, will be discussing the report submitted on Saturday by the AIFF-ISL coordination committee, which requested to start the season at the earliest among hoards of other trivial matters. Among them, the operational cost remains the bone of contention for the clubs in the absence of a commercial partner and broadcasters.

AIFF, who has already announced that it will confirm the dates for the season this week, will submit its final report to the sports ministry for the Supreme Court's consideration after apprising the clubs.

It's also learnt that the federation has asked the clubs to pay an advance of 40 per cent of the operational cost by January 12. The coordination committee earlier recommended a deferred payment for the participation fee of Rs 1 crore to June.

Mumbai's Stasya wins silver at Junior C'ships

MUMBAI, PTI: Young equestrian talent Stasya Pandya of Mumbai delivered a commendable performance at the Junior National Equestrian Championship (JNEC), clinching a silver medal in the Dressage Team Event (Children 1 category) here.

Competing astride Kirhri Taonga from Surge Stables, Bengaluru, she scored 67.463 and played a key role in her team's podium finish.

Stasya trains and rides at the Amateur Riders Club here under the mentorship of coach Bobin Tshering.

The silver-winning team delivered a collective performance with Haripriya Singh astride Fritz scoring 71.243 and Amara Singh astride Count Me In D' Grading scoring 68.581, both representing Sea Horse Equestrian, Gujarat.

Dev Harish Kapoor, riding Serrano from Modi Equestrian, Meerut, added 65.934 to the tally.

The team secured the silver medal with a total score of 207.287.

Swiss secure quarterfinal ticket

PERTH, AFP

Switzerland's Belinda Bencic returns during her win over Italy's Jasmine Paolini in the United Cup on Sunday. AFP

Four-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka got her 2026 season off to a winning start for Japan in the United Cup, after Great Britain's Emma Raducanu pulled out of their singles clash with a foot injury.

But despite Osaka's win, GB took the match 2-1 with a deciding mixed doubles victory in the Sunday clash.

Switzerland came through the deciding mixed doubles against Italy, with a 7-5, 4-6, 10-7 win by Belinda Bencic and Jakub Paul over Sara Errani and Andrea Vavassori, enough to see the team through 2-1 into the quarterfinals. "There was great emotion from the team. We were into it with our hearts and it showed," Bencic said.

Against Britain, Osaka was too strong for 276th-ranked reserve Katie Swan, winning 7-6 (7/4), 6-1 as Raducanu watched from the sidelines.

GB captain Tim Henman said Raducanu, the 2021 US Open champion, could appear later in the event.

"She struggled with her foot at the end of last year. She's been practicing in London and is very close. Tomorrow (against Greece) is a bit up in the air."

Billy Harris, standing in for the injured Jack Draper, began with a 7-6 (7/4), 6-3 defeat of Shintaro Mochizuki. Great Britain sealed the match when Neal Skupski and Olivia Nicholls defeated Yasutaka Uchiyama and Nao Hibino 7-5, 4-6, 10-7.

Swiss veteran Stan Wawrinka, 40 and playing his final season, matched it with 23-year-old Italian Flavio Cobolli until a double-fault on match point proved to be the downfall of the three-time Grand Slam winner.

Wawrinka, playing his second three-hour match in as many days, lost 6-4, 6-7 (2/7), 7-6 (7/4).

Bencic spoiled the 30th birthday of Jasmine Paolini 6-4, 6-3. "I had to convince my mind after losing to her at the end of 2025," the winner said.

"It was about mentality out there but I knew I could do it."

In Sydney, Alexander Zverev clinched victory for Germany against the Netherlands as the world number three demolished Tallon Griekspoor 7-5, 6-0.

Eva Lys beat Suzan Lamens 6-2, 6-2 and Germany also took the doubles for a 3-0 sweep.

Playing his first match of 2026, Zverev dropped just seven points in a commanding second set.

"The first set, it was tough to get rhythm," said Zverev.

Canada beat China, with Victoria Mboko defeating Zhu Lin 2-6, 6-2, 6-0 and Felix Auger-Aliassime overcoming Zhang Zhizhen 6-4, 6-4.

Karnataka captain Sanjana Ramesh (No. 30) attempts to score a basket during her team's win over Maharashtra at the 75th Senior National Basketball Championships.

Karnataka teams start strong

BENGALURU, DHNS: The Karnataka men's and women's teams began their campaign on a strong note by posting comfortable wins on the first day of the 75th Senior National Basketball Championships at the Jawaharlal Nehru Indoor Stadium in Chennai on Sunday.

Results: Men: Group A: Karnataka: 104 (Anil Kumar BK 22, Aravind Arumugham 15, Aaron Montero 14, Pratyanshuanshu Tomar 10) bt Gujarat 69 (Mirant Italia 17, Jigrajsinh Gohil 17, Vinay Kaushil 13, Sahaj Kumar Kaushik 10).
Group B: Uttar Pradesh: 112 (Harsh Dagar 38, K ushal Singh 26, Satayjeet Chaprana 17) bt Punjab: 100 (Tejinderbir Singh 23, GurwinderSingh 20, ShabibSingh 20, Swapnil Singh 10).
Women: Group A: Karnataka: 91 (Sruti Aravind 24, Mahek Sharma 21, Sobana S 16, Bhandhavya M 14) bt Maharashtra: 71 (Siya Deodhar 21); Indian Railways: 101 (Pusha Senthil Kumar 19, Manmeet Kaur 18, Sathya 17, Dharshini 14, Harshita 10) bt Delhi: 51 (Kritika D Garimaima Gosain 11).

Making strong efforts to host the 2036 Olympics: PM Modi

VARANASI, PTI

Narendra Modi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday asserted that India is preparing with full strength to host the 2036 Olympic Games and declared his government was committed to providing "more and more players greater opportunities to compete" by hosting mega sporting events in the country.

Addressing the inaugural function of the 72nd Senior National Volleyball Championship, being held here, via video conference, Modi said, the government was making every possible effort to provide exposure to budding athletes to take up Olympic sports, and schemes like Khelo India were proving a game-changer in harnessing talent.

"The 2030 Commonwealth Games will be held in India and the country is making strong efforts to host the 2036 Olympics, with the aim of giving more and more players greater opportunities to compete," said Modi.

"Through the Khelo India campaign, hundreds of youth have had the chance to advance to the national level," added Modi.

Noting that initiatives like the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPs) were transforming the sports ecosystem in India, with efforts focused on building strong infrastructure, funding mechanisms, and providing young athletes with global exposure, he said that the country's growing clout in sport could be gauged from the fact that India had hosted 20 top-notch international competition in the last 10 years.

"India has hosted more than 20 major international events across several cities, including the FIFA Under-17 World Cup, Hockey World Cup, and major chess tournaments."

Recalling the time when the government and society were indifferent towards sports, he said the past decade had brought about a massive change in the mindset of the country.

"The government has significantly increased the sports budget, and today India's sports model has become athlete-centric with focus on talent identification, scientific training, nutrition, and transparent selection, ensuring that the interests of players are prioritised at every level," he said. "Today the nation is riding on the 'reform express', with every sector and every development destination connected to it, and sports being one of them," he said.

"India's progress is not limited to the economic front but is also reflected in the confidence seen on the sports field. India's performance across various sports has consistently improved since 2014."

ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ ಸರ್ಕಾರ
ಶ್ರೀ ಸುಗ್ರೀವ ವೆಂಕಟರಮಣ ಸ್ವಾಮಿ ದೇವಾಲಯ,
ಕಾರ್ಯನಿರ್ವಾಹಕ ಅಧಿಕಾರಿ, ಬಳೇಪೇಟೆ, ಬೆಂಗಳೂರು
ದೂರವಾಣಿ: 080-2331339, Email:samuhadevalya12@gmail.com

ಸಂಖ್ಯೆ: ಕಾ.ನಿ.ಅ/ಸಿಆರ್-25/2025-26 ದಿನಾಂಕ: 05.01.2026

ಪ್ರಕಟಣೆ

ಬೆಂಗಳೂರು ನಗರ ಬಳೇಪೇಟೆಯಲ್ಲಿರುವ ಶ್ರೀ ಸುಗ್ರೀವ ವೆಂಕಟರಮಣ ಸ್ವಾಮಿ ದೇವಾಲಯಕ್ಕೆ ಸೇರಿದ ಖಾಲಿ ಇರುವ 04 ಅಂಗಡಿಗಳನ್ನು ಪರಿಶಿಷ್ಟ ಜಾತಿಯವರಿಗೆ-01, ಹಿಂದುಳಿದ ವರ್ಗದವರಿಗೆ-01 ಹಾಗೂ ಸಾಮಾನ್ಯ ವರ್ಗದವರಿಗೆ-02 ಗುತ್ತಿಗೆ ನೀಡಲು ಮೀಸಲಾತಿ ನಿಗಧಿಪಡಿಸಿ 5 ವರ್ಷಗಳ ಅವಧಿಗೆ ಪ್ರಸಕ್ತ ಮಾರುಕಟ್ಟೆಯ ದರಕ್ಕನುಗುಣವಾಗಿ ಹಂಚಿಕೆ ಮಾಡುವ ಸಂಬಂಧ ಇ-ಟೆಂಡರ್ ಪ್ರಕಟಣೆಯನ್ನು ಹೊರಡಿಸಲಾಗಿದ್ದು, ಆಸಕ್ತರು ಇ-ಪ್ರೊಕ್ಯೂಮೆಂಟ್ ಪೋರ್ಟಲ್ ನಲ್ಲಿ ಅರ್ಜಿಶುಲ್ಕ ಪಾವತಿಸುವ ಮೂಲಕ **ದಿನಾಂಕ 05.01.2026** ರಂದು ಅರ್ಜಿಗಳನ್ನು **www.eprock.karnataka.gov.in** ಇ-ಪ್ರೊಕ್ಯೂರ್‌ಮೆಂಟ್ ಮೂಲಕ ಡೌನ್‌ಲೋಡ್ ಮಾಡಿಕೊಂಡು **ದಿನಾಂಕ 20.01.2026 ಸಂಜೆ 5.00 ಗಂಟೆಯವರೆಗೆ** ಅರ್ಜಿಗಳನ್ನು ಸಲ್ಲಿಸಬಹುದಾಗಿರುತ್ತದೆ. ಹೆಚ್ಚಿನ ಮಾಹಿತಿಗಾಗಿ ಕಛೇರಿ ದೂರವಾಣಿ ಸಂಖ್ಯೆ **080-23313339** ಅನ್ನು ಸಂಪರ್ಕಿಸಲಾಗಿದೆ ಅಥವಾ ಕಛೇರಿಗೆ ಭೇಟಿ ನೀಡಿ ಹೆಚ್ಚಿನ ಮಾಹಿತಿಯನ್ನು ಪಡೆದುಕೊಳ್ಳಬಹುದಾಗಿದೆ.

ಸಹಿ/- ಕಾರ್ಯನಿರ್ವಾಹಕ ಅಧಿಕಾರಿಗಳು
ಶ್ರೀ ಸುಗ್ರೀವ ವೆಂಕಟರಮಣ ಸ್ವಾಮಿ ದೇವಾಲಯ,
ಬಳೇಪೇಟೆ, ಬೆಂಗಳೂರು

ವಾಸಾಸಂ/ವಾಪ್ರ/4838/ಶಿರಡಿ ಸಾಯಿ/2025-26

KARNATAKA STATE POLLUTION CONTROL BOARD
Parisara Bhavana, No.49, Church Street, Bangalore-560001
Phone : 080-25581383, Fax : 080-25586321

No.: PCB/169/BLD/2023/2025-26/3972 Dated: 30/12/2025

INVITATION FOR TENDER (CALL-2)
(Through GOK e-procurement platform http://kppp.karnataka.gov.in)

The Karnataka State Pollution Control Board (KSPCB) invites tenders from eligible tenderers through GoK e-procurement platform http://kppp.karnataka.gov.in by The Member Secretary for the following work:

Name of the work: Proposed Construction of KSPCB Regional Office building at Gadag. Approx Value of the work: **Rs.289.40 Lakhs**. All payments such as tender cost, EMD etc., shall be made in e-payment mode only.

Tender Schedule/Dates

NIT Published Date	As per e-procurement portal
Date & Time for Pre-Bid Meeting	As per e-procurement portal
Last Date & Time for Receipt of Tenders	As per e-procurement portal
Date & Time for Opening Technical Bid	As per e-procurement of portal

For more details, please refer e-procurement website: http://kppp.karnataka.gov.in.

Sd/-
MEMBER SECRETARY

DIPR/CP/4847/AKAR/2025-26

Our motto is to minimize waste generation through judicious use of natural resources

KARNATAKA POWER TRANSMISSION CORPORATION LIMITED
(CIN: U40109KA1999SGC025521)
No: CEE/Tr(Op)ZB/SEE(O)/AEE-3/F-306(2)/GBR/2025-26/8326-27 Date: 23.12.2025

TENDER NOTIFICATION (Through KPPP mode only)

KPTCL invites bid against the **enquiry No: KPTCL/CEE/T(O)Z/BZ/PTK-20 (Call-2)** For Erection of 3 no.s of 11kV MCVCB switchgear feeder panels for bifurcation of 11kV feeders at **66/11kV Nallimaradahalli S/s**, Operation Division, Doddaballapura on **Partial Turnkey Basis** including supply of all matching materials/ equipments (excluding supply of 11kV MCVCB feeder panel), erection (including civil works) of all materials/ equipments, testing & commissioning.

The bids will be received through electronic tender mode only. The detailed notification regarding the subject enquiry in the e-tendering process can be obtained by logging in to **KPP Portal website www.kppp.karnataka.gov.in** on or after **15.01.2026.** Other details can be obtained from the office of the undersigned.

Sd/- Chief Engineer (Elec.), Transmission (Operations) Zone, KPTCL, A.R. Circle, Bengaluru-09.

Litton Das

Don't want to play T20 WC games in India, says BCB

T20, from Page 1

"Following a thorough assessment of the prevailing situation and the growing concerns regarding the safety and security of the Bangladesh contingent in India and considering the advice from the Bangladesh Government, the Board of Directors resolved that the Bangladesh National Team will not travel to India for the tournament under the current conditions."

The International Cricket Council (ICC) will need to address the issue as Bangladesh are scheduled to play all four of their leagues games in India.

Like the arrangement with Pakistan, Bangladesh wants all of their matches to be shifted to Sri Lanka, the co-host of the tournament.

"In light of this decision, the BCB has formally requested the International Cricket Council (ICC), as the event authority, to consider relocating all of Bangladesh matches to a venue outside India (co-host Sri Lanka)," read the statement further. "The Bangladesh Cricket Board looks forward to the ICC's understanding of the situation and an urgent response on this matter."

Litton to lead

Bangladesh on Sunday named their squad for the T20 World Cup beginning in February, leaving out middle-order batters Jaker Ali Anik and Mahidul Islam, and selecting five fast bowlers.

Bangladesh squad: Litton Das (captain), Mohammad Saif Hasan, Tanzid Hasan Tamim, Parvez Hossain Emon, Towhid Hridoy, Shamim Hossain, Nurul Hasan Sohan, Mahedi Hasan, Rishad Hossain, Nasum Ahmed, Mustafizur Rahman, Tanzim Hasan Sakib, Taskin Ahmed, Mohammad Shaifuddin, Shoriful Islam.

Gujarat bat Karnataka out of the competition

BENGALURU, DHNS: A listless Karnataka were shown the exit door as Gujarat batted and then batted some more to make the semifinal of the Cooch Behar Trophy on the basis of a first-innings lead on the final day at the Sardar Patel Stadium in Valsad on Sunday.

On the fourth day, it looked like Karnataka were just delaying the inevitable after handing Gujarat a massive 349-run lead at stumps on the third day, with still eight wickets in the kitty.

Resuming at their overnight score of 178/2, Gujarat piled on more misery with contributions from Malay V Shah (108), Manas M Dave (78), Rudra N Patel (70 not out), Patel Kush (68) and Purav M Pujara (60), to declare on 432 for seven in 95.4 overs.

For Karnataka, Dhyaan M Hiremath (3/103) and Krishav S Somasundar (2/77) picked up five wickets between them.

Brief scores: Gujarat: 451 & (O/n: 178/2) 432/7d in 95.4 overs (Malay V Shah 108, Purav M Pujara 60, Manas M Dave 78, Patel Kush 68, Rudra N Patel 70 n.o.; Krishav S Somasundar 2-77, Dhyaan M Hiremath 3-103 vs Karnataka: 280 all out.

◆ ON TV ◆

CRICKET

5th Ashes: Australia vs England (day 2, 4:30 am). **LIVE** on **Star Sports Network, JioHotstar.**

HOCKEY

HIL: SG Pipers vs HIL GC **(men, 7:30 pm)**; Soorma Hockey Club vs Ranchi Royals **(women, 5 pm)**. **LIVE** on **Sony Sports Network.**

CRICKET FIFTH ASHES TEST

Root & Brook anchor Eng

Duo put on an unbroken 154-run stand on rain-hit day 1 against Aussies

SYDNEY, AFP

Joe Root and Harry Brook tamed Australia's all-pace attack with an unbroken 154-run stand on Sunday to rescue England and give them the upper hand after a rain-hit day one of the fifth and final Ashes Test.

Batting after skipper Ben Stokes won the toss at a sold-out Sydney Cricket Ground, they steered the tourists to 211-3 when bad light forced them from the field just before tea.

Subsequent rain and the risk of lightning made no further play possible.

Root was not out 72 and Brook on 78, coming together with England tottering at 57-3 after losing Ben Duckett (27), Zak Crawley (16) and Jacob Bethell (10) before lunch.

The world's top two-ranked batsmen set about counter-attacking on a decent batting pitch providing little movement for the bowlers, who toiled hard in the second session without joy.

Both brought up hard-fought half-centuries and, with dark storm clouds looming, kept the scoreboard ticking over at a fast clip.

England came into the game buoyed by a four-wicket win inside two days in the previous Test in Melbourne, desperate to keep the momentum going.

That victory snapped a 15-year winless streak in Australia but came too late to save the series, with the hosts retaining the urn by winning in Perth, Brisbane and Adelaide.

Joe Root (left) and Harry Brook forged an unbroken 154-run stand for the fourth wicket to put England in command against Australia on the opening day of the fifth Test in Sydney on Sunday. AFP

Hate doing it

It is the first time in almost 140 years that the hosts have not played a front-line spinner during a Sydney Test.

"Hate doing it," said Australia skipper Steve Smith.

"But if we keep producing wickets that we don't think are going to spin and seam is going to play a big part and cracks are going to play a big part, you kind of get pushed into a corner."

England brought in seamer Matthew Potts for the injured Gus Atkinson in their only change, with their frontline slow bowler Shoaib Bashir missing out for a fifth straight Test.

The day began with a tribute to first responders at the Bondi mass shooting last month that killed 15 people, with huge cheers when hero Ahmed Al Ahmed, who tackled one of the gunmen, appeared.

Duckett was lively when play started, crunching five boundaries from Mitchell Starc in a quickfire 27 off 24 balls.

But England's tormentor-in-chief Mitchell Starc had the last laugh, enticing an outside edge from an angled ball to wicketkeeper Alex Carey at full stretch.

It was the fifth time Starc has bagged Duckett this series.

Crawley was next to go, trapped lbw by Michael Neser, with both openers back in the sheds by the first drinks break and the tourists in trouble on 51-2.

A cautious Bethell took 15 balls to get off the mark and never looked confident.

He departed after prodding at a moving delivery from Scott Boland that took a faint edge and was collected easily by Carey as England fell to 57-3.

Root joined Brook at the crease and they began to rebuild.

They rotated the strike well and punished any loose balls with Root bringing up his 67th half-century, and the 100-partnership, with a single off Webster.

Only Indian great Sachin Tendulkar with 68 has scored more Test fifties.

Brook was fortunate to survive on 45 when he slogged Starc and the ball dropped between three chasing fielders.

But he kept his composure to reach a 15th half-century four balls after Root, cracking Webster through the covers for a boundary.

Brief scores: England: 211/3 in 45 overs (Ben Duckett 27, Joe Root 72 n.o., Harry Brook 78 n.o.) vs Australia.

Aus great Martyn out of coma

SYDNEY, AFP

Australian Test great Damien Martyn has woken from an induced coma following meningitis, with ex-teammate Adam Gilchrist on Sunday calling it "a miracle".

The 54-year-old Martyn, who played 67 Tests between 1992 and 2006 and 208 one-day internationals, fell seriously ill late last month and was rushed to hospital.

The former batter was diagnosed with meningitis, an inflammation of the membranes surrounding the brain and spinal cord.

"It's been an unbelievable turn of events in the last 48 hours," Gilchrist said.

"He is now able to talk and respond to treatment.

"He has responded extraordinarily well since coming out of the coma to the point where his family feels it's like some sort of miracle."

Martyn is set to be moved out of intensive care at Gold Coast University Hospital.

A who's who of cricket greats have over the past week posted messages of support,

Damien Martyn

including former England skipper Michael Vaughan and Indian legends Ravichandran Ashwin and VVS Laxman.

Known as one of the game's great strokemakers, Martyn became a key figure in Steve Waugh's all-powerful Australian side, hitting 13 centuries and averaging 46.37.

He was also part of the Australia team that won the 2003 ODI World Cup, cracking 88 not out in the final against India in a match-winning partnership with Ricky Ponting.

Martyn retired in 2006 during the Ashes series and had kept a low profile since.

Lanning named UP Warriorz captain

MUMBAI, PTI: Former Australian skipper Meg Lanning was on Sunday named the captain of UP Warriorz ahead of the Women's Premier League beginning January 9.

The legendary Australian was the captain of Delhi Capitals for the first three editions of the competition, having led them to each of the summit clashes but finished on the losing end.

"The Capri Sports-owned UP Warriorz announced the appointment of Australian legend Meg Lanning as captain of the franchise ahead of the 2026 Women's Premier League (WPL) season," the franchise said in a statement.

Lanning was signed by UP Warriorz for Rs 1.9 crore at the auction.

As an Australian player, she is a seven-time World Cup winner which includes two ODI titles and five T20 titles.

Reed's screamer rescues Fulham

Liverpool's woes continue in 1-1 draw; Cunha saves United against rivals Leed

LONDON, REUTERS

Harrison Reed's 97th-minute screamer gave Fulham a dramatic 2-2 home draw against Liverpool in the Premier League on Sunday, after Cody Gakpo thought he had won it for the visitors in added time.

Liverpool academy graduate Harry Wilson gave Fulham the lead in the 17th minute with a sweet shot into the bottom corner after he was played in by Raul Jimenez, with the goal initially disallowed for offside before VAR intervened.

The visitors looked toothless in the first half without top scorer Hugo Ekitike, but improved after the break and Florian Wirtz put them level with a clinical finish in the 57th minute for his second Liverpool goal.

After Alexis Mac Allister and Wilson both hit the woodwork in a frantic, end-to-end second half, Gakpo seemingly snatched the win in the 94th minute, bundling home Jeremie Frimpong's cross to spark wild celebrations from the travelling Reds. But Reed earned a share of the spoils at the death with a sublime long-range strike, finding the top corner from all of 30 metres with his first goal since April 2023.

Liverpool – now unbeaten in eight league games and nine in all competitions – remain fourth on 34 points from 20 games, 14 points behind leaders Arsenal. Fulham are 11th with 28 points.

Manchester United's Matheus Cunha celebrates after scoring the equaliser against Leeds United on Sunday. REUTERS

Manchester United snatched a 1-1 draw at Leeds United on Sunday after Matheus Cunha cancelled out Brenden Aaronson's opener in a frantic three-minute spell that epitomised a chaotic Premier League encounter.

The Brazilian forward shouldered the creative burden for United with several key players missing, proving a constant menace before silencing the raucous Elland Road crowd with his second-half equaliser.

The draw between the two age-old rivals lifted the visitors provisionally to fifth place while Leeds remain 16th.

Brentford striker Igor Thiago netted a superb hat-trick as his side stormed to a 4-2 win at Everton on Sunday that moved them up to seventh place, strengthening their challenge to qualify for Europe for the first time.

The 24-year-old Brazilian forward started the season on fire, but hadn't found the back of the net since November before breaking his goal drought in emphatic fashion on Merseyside to take his league tally to 14 goals for the campaign.

The visitors made their breakthrough early, winning the ball high up the pitch for Vitaly Janelt to pick out Thiago in the middle, and he steered a low volley past Jordan Pickford and into the bottom corner in the 11th minute.

Results: On Sunday: Everton: 2 (Beto 66th, Barry 90+1) lt to Brentford: 4 (Igor Thiago 11th, 51st, 88th, Collins 50th); Fulham: 2 (Wilson 17th, Reed 90+7) drew with Liverpool: 2 (Wirtz 57th, Gakpo 90+4); Leeds: 1 (Aaronson 62nd) drew with Manchester United: 1 (Cunha 65th); Newcastle: 2 (Guimaraes 71st, Thiaw 78th) bt Crystal Palace: 0; Tottenham: 1 (Davies 30th) drew with Sunderland: 1 (Brobbey 80th).

On Saturday: Bournemouth: 2 (Evanilson 10th, Kroupi 76th) lt to Arsenal: 3 (Gabriel 16th, Rice 54th, 71st).

Garcia 'tricks as Real batter Betis

MADRID, AFP: Gonzalo Garcia bagged a hat-trick for Real Madrid as they beat Real Betis 5-1 on Sunday to stay on La Liga leaders Barcelona's tail.

Spanish striker Garcia, filling in for the injured Kylian Mbappe, opened the scoring after 20 minutes and then volleyed home a superb second early in the second half to give Madrid a commanding lead.

Raul Asencio further extended Xabi Alonso's side's advantage before Cucho Hernandez pulled one back for the visitors.

Madrid youth academy product Garcia completed his hat-trick after 83 minutes with a clever flicked finish to delight fans at the Santiago Bernabeu, with Fran Garcia notching a late fifth.

Madrid, second, cut Barca's lead back down to four points after the champions edged Espanyol 2-0 in a Catalan derby on Saturday.

It eased the pressure on Alonso, who scraped through to 2026 at the helm despite reports he was on the verge of being sacked after a run of inconsistent form.

With top goalscorer Mbappe sidelined with a knee sprain, Alonso turned to 21-year-old forward Garcia to replace him, as he did

Gonzalo Garcia

during the Club World Cup last summer.

Garcia's opportunities have been limited this season despite acquitting himself well in the United States and he proved himself again.

Madrid started strongly and took a deserved lead through Garcia's looping header from Rodrygo Goes' free-kick.

Results: On Sunday: Sevilla: 0 lt to Levante: 3 (Losada 45+2, Espi 77th, Alvarez 90+4); Real Madrid: 5 (Gonzalo Garcia 20th, 50th, 82nd, Asencio 56th, Fran Garcia 90+3) bt Real Betis: 1 (Hernandez 60th).

On Saturday: Celta Vigo: 4 (Iglesias 33rd, 59th, El-Abdellaoui 83rd, Alvarez 90+4) bt Valencia: 1 (Pepelu 70th); Osasuna: 1 (Garcia 34th) drew with Athletic Bilbao: 1 (Guruzeta 71st); Elche: 1 (Neto 30th) lt to Villarreal: 3 (Moleiro 7th, Mikautadze 13th, Pedraza 83rd); Espanyol: 0 lt to Barcelona: 2 (Olmo 86th, Lewandowski 90th).

Bengaluru's Ishaan, Arjun finish second

BENGALURU, DHNS: Pune teenagers Arjun Chheda and Sai Shiva Sankaran held off their rivals from Bengaluru to win the MRF Formula 2000 and Formula 1600 races, respectively, to kick start their campaign in the third round of the MRF MMSC FMSCI Indian National Car Racing Championship at the Madras International Circuit on Sunday.

The 17-year-old Arjun fully capitalised on a poor start by pole-sitter Ishaan from Bengaluru and took the honours in the MRF F2000 races.

Finishing third behind the pair was another Bengalurean, Tarun MB who briefly was in P2 before yielding ground to Ishaan Madesh in the first lap.

Results: MRF F2000: Arjun Chheda (Pune) (12:46.225); Ishaan Madesh (Bengaluru) (12:46.796) 2; Tarun MB (Bengaluru) (13:09.429), 3.
MRF F1600: Sai Shiva Makesh Sankaran (Pune) (13:52.861) 1; Arjun S Nair (Bengaluru) (13:53.707) 2; Nigel Abraham Thomas (Bengaluru) (13:55.467) 3.
Indian Touring Cars: Biren Pithawalla (Mumbai, Team N1) (15:09.224) 1; Dhruv Chavan (Lonavala, Buzzing Hornet Motorsports) (15:21.522) 2; Perajun Krishnan (Kuala Lumpur, Team Performance Racing) (15:30.571) 3.
Indian Touring Cars 1625: Nikanth Rambalu (Coimbatore, Team Performance Racing) (15:50.915) 1; Vidyaprakash Damodaran (Coimbatore, Team Performance Racing) (15:57.182) 2.
Indian Junior Touring Cars: Rithwik Thomas (Bengaluru, Race Concepts Motorsports) (15:47.358) 1; Viswas Vijayaraj (Nellore, Team Performance Racing) (15:47.734) 2; Jarshan Anand (Chennai, pvt) (16:06.863) 3.
Super Stock: Diljith TS (Thrissur, DTS Racing) (16:34.355) 1; Kesara Godage (Colombo, Redline Racing) (16:39.516) 2; Lal Kattikulam Bharathan (Thrissur, DTS Racing) (16:46.063) 3.
Formula LGB 1300 (Open and Juniors): Vinith Kumar (Tirupur, DTS Racing) (15;13.793) 1; Joel Joseph (Ernakulam, DTS Racing) (15:13.853) 2; Lokithlingeash Ravi (Pollachi, DTS Racing) (15:14.969) 3.
MRF Saloons (Toyota Etios): Akshay Muralidharan (Coimbatore) (17:02.921) 1; 2. Tarushi Vikram (Chikkamagaluru) (17:12.409) 2; Siddhanth Koundinya (Bengaluru) (17:29.551) 3.

Arjun Chheda

Amputee Baumel wins Dakar Rally first stage

YANBU (SAUDI ARABIA), AFP: Frenchman Mathieu Baumel **(in pic)** hailed an "enormous triumph" as just a year after having his leg amputated he won the opening stage of the Dakar Rally alongside Belgian driver Guillaume De Mevius on Sunday.

Navigator Baumel was back at the race just 11 months after his right lower leg was amputated after being run over while helping someone who had broken down on the road in France.

Last January it had looked as if life behind the wheel was in the past for the successful co-driver and navigator.

"Just being here is an enormous triumph," said the 49-year-old, who got into his car on Sunday carrying his prosthetic limb.

Driving a mini the pair won the perilous 305km first stage at Yanbu, Saudi Arabia.

Baumel had previously won the Dakar Rally four times as co-pilot to Nasser Al-Attiyah, most recently back-to-back titles in 2022 and 2023.

On Sunday, Qatari Al-Attiyah in a Dacia was 40 second down in second with Czech Martin Prokop of Ford third at 1min 30sec.

Tigers begin in roaring fashion

CHENNAI, AGENCIES

Defending champions Shrachi Bengal Tigers opened their men's Hockey India League (HIL) campaign with a confident 3-1 victory over JSW Soorma Club here at the Mayor Radhakrishnan Hockey Stadium on Sunday.

For the Tigers, Sukhjeet Singh (33th), Abhishek (45th) and Gursewak Singh (60th) netted the goals while Prabhjot Singh (54th) pulled one back for Soorma.

In the day's other game, Vedanta Kalinga Lancers claimed a 4-2 victory over Ranchi Royals. Alexander Hendrickx (7th, 28th) and Gursahibjit Singh (16th, 26th) scored the goals for Vedanta Kalinga Lancers while Tom Boon (1st) and Mandeep Singh (9th) were the goalscorers for Ranchi Royals.

Shrachi Bengal Tigers' Gursewak Singh celebrates after scoring against JSW Soorma Club on Sunday. HI MEDIA

Meanwhile in the in the Women's Hockey India League at Ranchi, Agustina Gorzelany (37th) scored the winner as Shrachi Bengal Tigers recorded a 1-0 win over Ranchi Royals. With this win, the Bengal Tigers moved to the second position in the points table.

The opening quarter between Tigers men and Soorma was evenly balanced with both teams looking to settle into the contest. Soorma tried to stretch the Tigers' defence by switching play and using long passes. The Tigers, on the other hand, relied on quick counter-attacks and aerial balls into the circle.

Despite a few promising moves from Nicolas Poncelet and Tommy Willems, neither side could create a clear-cut chance in the opening 15 minutes.

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